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KITTY'S FATHER

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF 'THE ADMIRABLE LADY BIDDY FANE,' 'THE SMUGGLER'S SECRET,' 'FETTERED FOR LIFE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES VOL. III.



LONDON WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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KITTY'S FATHER

CHAPTER XXXV.

MISS STRONG PLAYS THE PART OF DELILAH.

'First of all, my deah Miss Strong,' said the curate, as he seated himself beside her, 'I must ask you one or two little questions. Have you seen the advertisement that appeared in the Weekly Gazette yesterday morning?'

'The reward that papa has offered through Mr. Singleton—yes.'

'And did Mr. Singleton tell you whom he suspects?'

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'Oh, he was much too guarded to do that. If he had told papa whom he suspected, his services would have been unnecessary, for it would have been so much more direct to go at once to the police and have the wretch apprehended. Certainly papa would never have offered to give so much money for what he could do himself. Indeed, we all think that Mr. Singleton has no knowledge whatever, or he would not need to offer a reward for information, and has simply induced papa to change the form of his offer in the hope that something may come from it. Oh, I am sure there's nothing in all that.'

'Not so quick, deah little lady,' said Mr. Shepherd, tapping her arm in tender reproof, 'not so quick. I think I shall show you that you are in error. When I read that advertisement yesterday morning I was seized with a very great desire to know what it meant, and as Mr. Shuttle had

gone out for the day, I resolved to go up to London and see Mr. Singleton, for one should always profit by one's opportunities to acquire knowledge. And so to London I went. I found Mr. Singleton in Chancery Lane, and told him very candidly who I was and what I had come there to see him for. He was very pleased to see me, and, taking me into his little private office, he told me such strange things that I am prone to believe he will really win that sum of money your deah papa has offered.'

'No, Mr. Shepherd, you really must not do that,' said Miss Strong, gently but firmly removing his hand, which he had gradually put upon her waist.

'You naughty, unkind pussy!' exclaimed Mr. Shepherd, in a tone of agreeable sorrow.

'Come, let us be serious—what was it Mr. Singleton told you that makes you think this?'

'Ah, now you make a demand which I should be very reluctant to comply with if I had not very great faith in your discretion. But before I do so, you must give me that deah little hand and promise not to tell your deah papa what I confide to you, for if he knew all he might commit some rash action which would entirely upset our little plans.'

Miss Strong, overcoming her repugnance, yielded her hand, but she had no occasion to give any promise, as the amorous curate was too transported with the delight of dabbing her hand in his to think of anything else for the time. When she withdrew her hand he continued:

'Well, deah, deah, deah Miss Strong,' he pursued, with gathering fervour, and a little pause to collect his thoughts, as he fanned his fevered face with his hat—'well, Mr. Singleton told me that he suspected two men of the crime, and hoped that the

reward would lead one to betray the other; and when I asked him who those two men were, he replied that the principal one was' —looking round him, and then lowering his voice to a whisper—'Mr. Shuttle.'

'Mr. Shuttle " exclaimed Miss Strong, in a low tone of feigned incredulity.

'I dare say you find it difficult to believe, and so did I; for up to this time I have regarded him as a dear and generous friend, and a most worthy man. But when I expressed incredulity, Mr. Singleton smiled, and, unlocking a little drawer in his desk, drew out some photographs, and, laying them before me, asked if I recognised my deah friend in them. Some of them were quite faded with age, and some of them were quite fresh; one of them had the words "John Evans, 1888," written below, and another, "James Blyth, 1879," and another, "Colonel Denvers Plug, 1882"; one had whiskers, and a second a moustache, and a third a beard; but in all I saw an unmistakable likeness to Mr. Decimus Shuttle.'

'Is it possible?'

'Those were my very words, to which Mr. Singleton replied that Mr. Shuttle had been known to the police for ten or twelve years, but that up to the present time they have been unable to get sufficient evidence to "run him in"—I use his expression. He told me that they suspected him of being concerned in certain burglaries at Birkenhead, and could produce positive evidence to show that he was in Chester at the time of the races. You cannot tell what a shock it was to hear this, for I had trusted Mr. Shuttle so implicitly, and have been so delighted to cheer him up and bear him company; and when he proposed that I should return to Chicago with him and undertake mission work amongst the cowboys and hog-stickers in that place, I quite believed he was in earnest. And when Mr. Singleton proved beyond doubt that Mr. Shuttle was in Chester at that time, it made me so sad — so very sad.' The expression of his face but faintly proved the truth of this assertion, and he continued with eagerness: 'Then I asked Mr. Singleton who the other man was whom he suspected, and he told me the man was an ex-convict named William Roberts; and, furthermore, he informed me that he himself saw this man slip out of the Vicarage by the side-gate in Love Lane on Thursday night at the very moment I rang the bell on my return from the singing-class. What do you think of that, my deah Miss Helen?'

'I do not know what to think. It is so strange. Do you really believe it?'

'Oh, I cannot doubt it. And, truly, the more I ponder the matter the more I am convinced that Mr. Singleton is right. And

certain peculiarities in Mr. Shuttle's behaviour, which I attributed to his eccentricities, have now a very different significance for me. I can bear evidence that one night he went out when he had reason to believe that I was asleep in my little bed. He was absent for two hours, and did not return till nearly three in the morning. And only this morning I discovered footprints in the garden which do not at all correspond with Mr. Shuttle's boots, and also I found a beautiful propagating glass completely smashed, with the glass pressed into the earth, which verifies Mr. Singleton's assertion that William Roberts was there on Thursday evening, for I should have heard the glass breaking had the accident occurred at any other time.'

At this point Miss Strong began to doubt whether Mr. Shepherd had actually taken part in the crimes, whether the sole malefactors were not Shuttle and Roberts,

and whether their suspicions had not fallen unjustly on the curate through the impression he conveyed of being rather more of a rascal than a fool.

'Was it not imprudent of Mr. Singleton to expose so much to you?' she asked.

'I cannot deny that it seemed to me a little indiscreet on his part; but his reason for being so open with me was made abundantly evident by the fact that he wished me to co-operate with him in bringing Mr. Shuttle to justice.'

'Ah, I begin to see.'

'He told me very plainly that as matters stand at present there is not sufficient evidence to obtain even a search-warrant, and that until they can absolutely prove him to be in possession of stolen property it would be worse than useless to bring any charge against him. Then Mr. Singleton asked me a great many questions, and I told him all I knew about Mr. Shuttle,

and explained fully how we became acquainted, and how, having no employment, and being greatly out of pocket through expending money every day and carning nothing, and being of a naturally active disposition, and ever anxious to render services to my suffering fellow-creatures, I offered my services in the capacity of a gentleman help to Mr. Shuttle in the fulness of my heart, believing him to be what he represented himself; and, furthermore, I told him that Mr. Shuttle has some very large trunks, which taxed the strength of the porters who carried them upstairs trunks which a single gentleman travelling for the benefit of his health would scarcely encumber himself withal—trunks which he keeps locked up in the rooms adjoining his bedchamber, and has never yet opened in my presence. Whereupon Mr. Singleton pointed out that Mr. Shuttle had certainly rented the Vicarage for no other purpose than to store these trunks where the police would be less likely to suspect that robbers would conceal their spoil; and affirming that these trunks contained the very evidence he sought, Mr. Singleton straightway asked me if I were "game" to examine these trunks, and obtain possession of the will stolen from my late deah master, the Vicah, to which I replied that, much as I desired to further the ends of justice, I did not feel "game" to risk having my brains blown out by Mr. Shuttle, who carries a revolver in a behind pocket; and furthermore that, if I found an opportunity of making an investigation in Mr. Shuttle's absence, I had not the keys wherewith to open the doors of that room and the locks of those trunks. But Mr. Singleton made light of this difficulty, and taking a bunch of instruments from the drawer I have mentioned - instruments shaped like hooks of all dimensions-he showed me that with a little practice, after retiring to my chamber at night, I should soon be able to pick any lock in the world with them. And while I yet hesitated to comply with his suggestion, he promised me that the day I gave him the will he would pay me no less than five hundred pounds for my trouble.'

- 'And did you accept his offer?' asked Miss Strong eagerly.
- 'No; I told him that I was too conscientious to make a rash promise which I might not fulfil; but I took the bunch of instruments.'
 - 'And you have used them?'
- 'No; Mr. Shuttle came home too soon after my return.'
- 'But you will try, won't you, dear Mr. Shepherd?' said Miss Strong, employing a dash of blandishment to overcome the curate's reluctance.
- 'I know you would like me to do so, you artful little Tootsie!' said Mr. Shepherd

archly, as he dabbed the back of her hand gently; 'but what would it profit me if I obtained the will at one moment, and got my brains blown out in the next?'

Miss Strong drew her hand away, but the curate was so preoccupied with inner speculations that he continued to dab the palm of his own hand, fixing his glassy eye on the distance.

'Still,' he continued, 'five hundred pounds is a large sum. I know a very nice little living that I could buy with that sum and the little economies that I have made—a very nice little living in the Essex marshes, where there is not much to do, and where one might keep a little model farm, and make a considerable addition to one's income by selling butter and eggs and poultry and cut-flowers and feathered songsters through advertising in the Christian Empire and other respectable papers. A very nice little living!'

'Surely you will not let such an opportunity escape you. The advantages are quite exceptional.'

'Yes, yes, yes; you're a very clever little girl.' Mr. Shepherd warmed up again under the amatory flame. 'But I should not like to live in the Essex marshes alone. I should need someone to aid me in parochial duties—someone to cheer my fireside and toast my tea-cake; someone to pack the little articles for the parcels post. And you know who that someone must be.'

Miss. Strong attempted to detach his hand, which had crept round her waist, but he held on tightly now as he continued:

'We shall be so nice and happy, so bright and busy, and we shall make such a lot of money.'

'That in itself is sufficient inducement, I should think, to accept Mr. Singleton's proposal.'

'No, no, no. If I promise to get the

will, you also must promise to be my little wifie.'

'As I cannot promise you that, you must remove your hand—at once, if you please, or I shall be obliged to leave you.'

'Cruel, naughty, dear, darling little thing!' Mr. Shepherd exclaimed, with a wag of his head at each word, his teeth set with passionate fervour; and then, dashing the perspiration from his brow with the back of his hand, he continued: 'Do not say you refuse. Why should you?'

'I cannot accept your offer; and I cannot give you my reasons without betraying a certain amount of worldliness, which, I am afraid, would shock you.'

'On the contrary, I should esteem you the more for a due regard to those temporal advantages without which the most fruitful living might be rendered unproductive.'

'To begin with, then, I must consider

papa. What is to become of him if, after all, the will is not found?'

'I have thought of him, deah old gentleman! I dare say I could find some nice little occupation for him in the church, if he could kindly control his language, or he might assist us in our little commercial pursuits.'

The idea of her father officiating as pewopener, or netting the 'feathered songsters' which were to form part of Mr. Shepherd's general business, so tickled Miss Strong's imagination that she had to pause before replying in order to recover a serious tone.

'I must explain our position,' said she presently. 'It is a terrible one. Papa has not the means to pay all he owes, and I have not the experience or the ability to earn a living that would keep us both. I find myself pushed by circumstances to the extremity of marrying for money. If I marry Mr. Sherridan, it will be perfectly

immaterial to us whether the will is recovered or not. For I know that Mr. Sherridan will pay my father's debts, and I think I can rely on his making a settlement on me before his fortune is dissipated, which will at least put myself and my father beyond the range of destitution. I will confess to you, Mr. Shepherd, that, beyond friendship and a certain admiration for Mr. Sherridan's accomplishments, I have no feeling whatever for him.'

'You do not love him?'

'No; I solemnly protest that, if it were not for the advantages I have pointed out, I would refuse to be his wife; but I assure you with equal sincerity that if he asks me to be his wife, these advantages being assured, I shall consent.'

'Oh, this is really painful! Why should you marry a man whom you do not love, in whom you can have no confidence, no assurance of abiding affection, when I have offered you yet greater advantages—and I have promised to get the will?

'It remains to be seen whether you can keep that promise. The advantages in marrying Mr. Sherridan are certain; those you offer depend upon your ability to get the will from Mr. Shuttle. You cannot expect a young woman of my worldly disposition to abandon the substance for a shadow.'

The curate dropped his elbows on his knees, and, bending low, bit his nails in profound reflection.

'Again, to conceal none of my calculations from you, papa has offered Mr. Singleton a thousand pounds for the recovery of the will. If I accept Mr. Sherridan, the offer will be retracted, and we shall save all that money.'

Mr. Shepherd dropped his nails in alarm, and, raising his body slowly, said:

'If he has made this offer to Mr. Singleton, can he retract it?'

- 'Certainly; for I know that the agreement was made on consideration of the will being found within a certain time.'
- 'What time, deah Miss Strong—what period was fixed?'
 - 'That I cannot tell you.'
- 'And when do you expect to see Mr. Sherridan again?'
 - 'To-morrow.'

The curate again took to his nails. Miss Strong rose.

'One moment, deah Miss Strong, one moment,' exclaimed Mr. Shepherd, springing to his feet. 'If I undertake to get this will, mind, it is at the risk of my life. Will you promise not to give Mr. Sherridan a definite reply before next Sunday?'

Miss Strong considered for a moment or two as she went slowly to the gate; then suddenly, as if moved by a generous impulse, she said:

'I think I may promise that. Yes, Mr.

Shepherd, I will keep him at arm's-length until next Sunday—for your sake. But after that you must give up all thought of my sharing that dear little nest in the Essex marshes.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I JOIN MY DEAR KITTY AGAIN IN DUBLIN.

I тоок my letter to the railway-station, and put it in the box on the platform. A train had just come in, and I found some little difficulty in getting back to the trap; but what was my surprise when I reached the pavement to perceive Jack standing on the curb patting his mare's neck and speaking to the grinning little Jimmy.

'This is very thoughtful of you, Dick,' said he, grasping my hand; 'it's more than I expected of you.'

'Why, who on earth could have thought to find you here? This is the luckiest chance, to be sure. I only came up here to post a letter, thinking it might go on sooner than if I dropped it in the post-office.'

- 'Where was your letter for?'
- 'Dublin,' said I; 'and where have you come from?'
- 'Dublin,' he replied, with a queer look in his face.

Then we got into the trap, Jimmy taking the back seat, and my mind so greatly exercised with this double coincidence and certain misgivings with regard to Kitty which this expedition of Jack's suggested that I could say never a word. Jack was equally silent. However, when we were well started, and the noise of the wheels prevented little Jimmy from hearing our conversation, I edged a little nearer to him, and said:

- 'Tell me all about it, Jack.'
- 'I couldn't stand it any longer,' he replied. 'I've been hungering for a glimpse

of the dear little soul for weeks, and at last I reached that point of starvation at which a man must yield to his cravings at any hazard. And what reason was there, Dick, for holding out longer?

'Well, there was that sort of promise you made.'

'Oh, that is unbroken. I did not speak to her—only just feasted my eyes and ears for a couple of hours or so.'

'If that was all, I see no harm in it—as far as she is concerned.'

'If there had been, I think I could have controlled my craving a little longer. I started about an hour after you, caught the mail to Holyhead, and arrived at Dublin in time to get dinner before going to the theatre.' He looked very grave, and after a pause added: 'I think you must go over there, Dick. She looked just her lovely bright little self while she was acting; but in the intervals, when she had no business,

there was an expression of anxiety and trouble in her face which ought not to be there.'

'She confessed, for the first time, to a feeling of unhappiness in her last letter,' said I.

'I feared that by your saying nothing about that letter to me, old chap, and the look of your face,' he replied.

He was too delicate to question me now about the contents of the letter, but he waited for me to speak.

- 'She asked me to come to her,' said I, 'and I will go before long.'
- 'Your journey to Scarborough has not resulted in any immediate engagement?'
 - ' None.'
- 'Then run over to-morrow. You know I shall be sorry to lose you; but it's for her good, Dick, and you ought to go. There's a young priest hanging about her skirts—walked home with her after the show.'

- 'Surely you have no reason to be jealous of a priest?'
- 'I'm not more reasonable than another man in that respect. But it isn't altogether that which makes me distrustful and uneasy.'
- 'Do you think he may convert her to the Church of Rome?'

He laughed.

'Her creed is a matter of small importance, and if an institution may be judged by its representatives, the Church of Rome cannot be much worse than that which the Rev. Crawley Shepherd represents. It's the influence which this man may bring to bear upon Kitty's peculiarly emotional disposition that I fear. In a lower grade of society a disposition of that kind might be affected by the influence of a Salvationist. In both cases the danger arises from an unhealthy condition of mind. It is difficult to explain what I mean without casting a

slur upon devotion, which is far from my intention; but I think Kitty's own behaviour illustrates the fact. She broke off her engagement with me upon what seems to be a strained scruple at the time when her mind was overwrought by the excitement of producing the play. Change of scene and the healing effect of time restored her to a normal condition. You have shown me that her letters were cheerful and healthy in tone; now there is a relapse, consequent upon a feeling of solitude, perhaps, to which she is unaccustomed, and I fear some act of self-sacrifice as the consequence. No doubt the fear leads me to exaggerate the danger; but, without that, the fact of her being down-hearted is a sufficient reason for your going without delay.'

'That is quite true. I will go over tomorrow,' I said. 'Heaven knows she can scarcely be better pleased to see me than I to see her—my dear Kitty.' Then, after reflecting a little while on what Jack had said, I continued: 'I think I understand what is in your mind, and what you might have made clearer if you had less modesty. If Kitty loves you very dearly, and finds it impossible to forget you, and, feeling very unhappy with the conviction that she can never be your wife, craves for something in the place of human affection, she may be tempted to accept the consolation offered by a religious life.'

'As many unhappy women have accepted it before.'

'Ha! ha!' I exclaimed hopefully. 'We shall see if an old uncle's influence isn't stronger than a young priest's.'

Then, my thoughts running on priests, I told Jack that I had seen Mr. Crawley Shepherd and Miss Strong together, and of what that young lady had said to me in his presence.

'She's a clever woman,' said he, 'and if

that fellow has the will, I believe she'll get it out of him. To-morrow I'll go over there and see how the game is going. Mind, Dick, I shall hold my promise null and void the moment it is proved that the will exists, and that I am no longer a man of fortune. I shall claim Kitty's hand at once, all other objections to the contrary notwithstanding.'

As I knew nothing then of the facts brought out in the interview between Miss Strong and the curate—facts which afterwards changed my views completely—it seemed to me that the restitution of the will depended much less upon Mr. Shepherd's weakness than on Yorke's strength; however, I said nothing to Jack, of course, on this head, and was contented to think that if Yorke only stuck to his promise the desired end would be gained.

The next afternoon I landed in Dublin, and very shortly after I dropped into the sitting-room where Mrs. St. Vincent and

Kitty were taking tea together. My poor Kitty, who had only received my letter a few hours before, was so overcome with astonishment at seeing me that for a moment or so she could only look at me with the bewilderment of one suddenly awoke; but in that brief space I saw that secret suffering had preved upon her pretty cheek; she looked quite three or four years older. But as she recovered from the shock the colour mounted to her face, joy flashed in her eyes, and at once she became the beautiful young creature of past time. She flung her arms about my neck, kissed me again and again, murmuring incoherent words of welcome and joy between, while a couple of tears of joy ran down her smiling face. Then, when we were calmed down a little, she would have me eat (though I had but little inclination that way, my digestive apparatus being still sore with the unpleasant effects of the sea voyage), but yet must press my arm to her

side and nestle her face against my shoulder, and ask me an infinity of questions, so that the opportunities of raising my fork to my lips, or of opening them for other purposes than speaking, were few indeed.

'It's just like old times—the dear, delightful, good old times,' she said to me as we trotted off arm-in-arm to the theatre.

And that was true, only she played to me that night as I sat in the stalls in a manner altogether exceptional.

I went behind to fetch her after the performance, and when we came out by the stage-door she introduced me to Mr. Justin O'Gorman, the young priest, who was waiting there for her.

'I'm glad to make your acquaintance, sir,' I said; 'and I hope we may be very good friends,' I added significantly; and then, tucking Kitty's hand under my arm, I made him a bow and left him to escort Mrs. St. Vincent.

We had no serious talk, Kitty and I, that night, nor the next day either, for that was fully taken up in getting into our new lodgings—those which she had regarded so longingly—and making domestic arrangements, for I had promised Kitty that I would leave her no more; at any rate, while she remained in Ireland. I had made up my mind to be very careful what I said, and to commit myself in no way; and Kitty, observing that I did not refer to the remarks she made in her letter with regard to her father, evidently thought it inadvisable to broach such a serious subject until we were quite settled down, which was a great comfort to me, as it gave me time to arrange in my mind how I should treat the affair when I could no longer remain silent. But on Wednesday afternoon, as we were sitting in the park, I told her of all that happened during my visit to The Cedars, only suppressing those incidents which would have

disclosed the fact that Mr. Decimus Shuttle was her father. She looked very grave when I explained the comedy which Miss Strong had played with Jack to excite the jealousy and cupidity of Mr. Shepherd, and asked so many particulars about the affair that it was still under discussion when we returned to our lodgings.

'Do you think it was really pretence, dear?' she asked as she was setting the teathings.

'I am sure of it. Why, Jack told me the whole plot the very first day.'

'Of course they began by mere pretence; but Jack—Mr. Sherridan—is so nice, and Miss Strong appears to be so very charming'—with a vicious little emphasis on the 'very'—'that one might naturally expect it to develop into—into something serious.'

'Not a bit of it,' said I stoutly. But she was not convinced, I could see plainly enough,

- 'After all,' said she, in a husky tone, and swallowing something that seemed to have risen in her throat, 'one ought to hope that it may lead to something more than mere make-belief if it is for Mr. Sherridan's happiness.
- 'My dear,' said I, feeling that I would settle Mr. Justin O'Gorman's business at once—'my dear, Jack will never be happy till he's made you his wife.'
- 'Poor Jack!' she murmured, with a dismal shake of her head.
- 'Well, if he isn't poor Jack yet awhile, he soon will be, I hope, and then you'll have no excuse left for refusing him.'
- 'But my father--' she said, with a look of distraction, as the old conflict between inclination and principle was renewed by these words.
- 'If the will is restored by Shepherd, it will prove that your father was not the 40 VOL. III.

thief who stole it, and as to the more terrible suspicions we attached to that theft, I have your father's own assurance that he is guiltless of that crime.'

She looked at me with wild incredulity.

- 'You have not said a word of this in your letters.'
- 'I did not intend to tell you until the will had been found to prove the truth of his assertion, but, as usual, you have upset all my resolutions.'
 - 'And you think Jack loves me still?'
- 'I'm as certain of it as I am that you are sitting there. Why, his last words to me were, "Mind, if the will is found I shall hold my promise as null and void, and no other objection shall stand in my way. The moment it is proved that I have lost my fortune I shall claim Kitty's hand"—and that's another thing I didn't mean to tell you.'
 - 'Hush!' she cried, springing to her feet;

then, after listening for an instant in strained suspense, she rushed to the door, crying, 'Tis his step-Jack, Jack-my love!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SHADOW THAT COMES WITH A GREAT LIGHT.

KITTY herself opened the door to Jack, whose brisk step in passing before the window had caught her ear before the woman of the house had time to answer his sharp knock. I did not stir from my seat, for to my mind there is such sanctity in this delicate sentiment of love that it jars upon my feelings even to see the tender embraces of lovers represented on the stage. It was sufficient for me to hear the smothered murmur of their voices as they met in the little passage outside the sittingroom, the hysterical mingling of laughter

and sobs in which Kitty's emotion expressed itself, and the gentle remonstrance by which Jack soothed her agitated feelings. A great happiness filled my heart; nevertheless, a misgiving crossed my mind as I thought of Kitty's father and certain difficulties that were yet to be cleared away before I could say: 'Now it is all right. No matter what happens, Kitty's happiness is assured.'

They came towards the room. At the door they paused again, and I heard Kitty say:

'Oh, Jack, I am the most inconsistent girl in the whole world, for not a day has passed since we parted but I have wished you to come back to me.'

I did not catch Jack's response; but it must have been very pleasing to Kitty, for after a brief interval of silence, when they entered the room, her face was radiant with happiness.

'The will is found, then, Jack?' said I,

giving him my hand and grasping his affectionately.

'Yes,' said he; 'that rascally curate took it up to Singleton yesterday morning, and he brought it in triumph to The Cedars last night, just as I was about to leave. Oh, there's no doubt about it; I've seen it with my own eyes. Every farthing of my grandfather's fortune is bequeathed to Strong; and now,' he added, turning to Kitty, 'I am as poor a man as my best friend could wish. The "Blue-stocking" has come to the end of its inglorious run in London, and starvation stares me in the face.'

He raised an empty plate as he spoke, and at this hint Kitty and I bustled about to put the best we had before him. I left Kitty and Jack looking in the chiffonier-cupboard for the pickles, but when I returned from the kitchen with the cold shoulder of mutton they were just as far as ever from finding them, though it turned out that the

bottle was right before their eyes. Their heads were quite turned with happiness, that was clear, and if I had not kept an eye on the clock Kitty would certainly never have got to the theatre in time to answer her call.

After leaving her at the stage-door, Jack and I had a good half-hour for serious talk, and as soon as we had lit our pipes I begged him to tell me all that had happened in the last three days.

'Well,' said he, 'on Monday I went to The Cedars, you know, and after lunch I found an opportunity of having a good long talk with Miss Strong, or, rather, of listening to what she had to say. And what she had to say was of such an extraordinary character that I hardly know what comment to make upon it.'

Then he narrated what passed between Miss Strong and Mr. Shepherd in the interview which I have more fully described from

her own account in a preceding chapter. This threw me into a state of complete perplexity, seeing which Jack with a smile said:

'You don't know what to make of it, eh, Dick? The fellow is such a liar that it's difficult for anyone to determine when he is telling the truth. Singleton, however, corroborates all that concerns their interview in Chancery Lane on Saturday. And between you and me, old chap, I'm inclined to believe that we've done that wretched curate an injustice, and given him credit for greater villainy than he is guilty of. A sneaking hound, a treacherous, mean-spirited. time-serving sycophant, and a cunning idiot, he may be; but I think the weight of evidence upsets the supposition that he was concerned in the murder and robbery of my grandfather.'

'Then who do you think is the real criminal, Jack?' I faltered.

- · Shuttle, beyond a doubt, and his mysterious accomplice Roberts.'
- But how did the curate obtain the will if Shuttle returned on Saturday.'
- 'He tells Singleton that he picked the locks on Sunday night, and found the will at the bottom of a trunk filled with old clothes. And here again his statement is supported by Singleton's evidence. course, a constant watch is kept on the house and grounds by the detectives, and shortly after eleven o'clock on Saturday night Shuttle was seen to leave the Vicarage by the side-door in Love Lane and join Roberts at the foot of the hill. He did not return until nearly five the next morning—that gave Shepherd six hours to carry out his operations, which he did, according to the account he gave Singleton, by the light of a piece of phosphorus in a bottle, after securing himself from surprise

by bolting the front door, by which Shuttle left the house.'

- 'Where is the curate now?'
- 'In London—hiding. He bolted from the Vicarage on Monday night, and he dare not return to Chester for the fear of encountering Shuttle or the yet more dreaded —because unknown—Roberts. That is his statement of the case—and it looks natural enough, doesn't it?'
- 'And what does the detective, Singleton, say? What is his opinion?'
- 'Of course, he doesn't show his hand, and plays his cards carefully. The game is a ticklish one; but it's easy to see that he regards the curate now as a negligeable quantity.'
 - 'And the Admiral?'

Jack laughed.

'Oh, the moment he heard that the curate had restored the will he was for getting a warrant to apprehend him for the

theft. "If you do that," said Singleton, at once, "I drop the affair altogether, and satisfy myself with the reward I have won. You will get no conviction, the curate will be discharged for want of evidence, and Shuttle and Roberts will be on the safe side of the Channel in less than twelve hours." That brought the Admiral to reason.

'But,' said I, with an inward chuckle of content, 'Singleton must drop the affair. It is not likely that he will put himself out of the way to continue this pursuit, now that you are no longer in a position to pay that reward you offered.'

'God bless your simplicity, Dick! Do you think such a man of war as old Strong will let the enemy escape because his crippled consort cannot continue the pursuit? Not he! He has doubled the offer, promising Singleton a couple of thousand the day he convicts the real

criminal, sticking to it manfully that Shepherd will be found guilty.'

I could only pray that Yorke might discover the loss of the will, and, connecting it with the curate's desertion, see the danger of his position, and escape before Singleton found further evidence against him.

'Do you know what steps Singleton is going to take next?' I asked.

'I've not the slightest idea. Evidently he expects to get stronger evidence against Shuttle and Roberts than Shepherd's statement that he got the will from one of Shuttle's clothes-boxes. His manner leads one to suspect that he has some other clue. However, we shall see, and very soon too. Singleton can't afford to let the grass grow under his feet now that Shuttle at any moment may find the will gone.'

'The sooner the better,' I said to myself, as we turned into the theatre, feeling that I could have no real peace of mind while this state of suspense continued. The latent care in my mind marred the delight I felt in the happiness of the young people who were so dear to me, for, whenever I saw their smiling interchange of love and contentment, the question occurred to me, 'Is this for the best? Can it last?'

There was the usual knot of people about the stage-door when we went round after the performance, and as I stopped to say good-evening to my old friend, Mrs. St. Vincent, Jack left me and passed in to find Kitty. I knew they would give us the slip by going out through the front, so I made no attempt to follow him. While I was still chatting with Mrs. St. Vincent we were joined by Mr. Justin O'Gorman, and it so happened that when the little group dispersed I found myself alone with this young man. He was tall and strikingly handsome, with dark, deep-sunk, thoughtful eyes, an aquiline nose, a delicate mouth, and a pronounced chin. Despite the tenderness of his lips and the dreamy softness of his eyes, there was a distinctly ascetic expression on his face, which was heightened by his pallor and the hollowness of his cheek.

Kitty had told me nothing about him, except that he lodged in the same house with them, and had been in the habit of coming to the theatre at night to escort them home, and, being curious to know whether Jack's suspicions were based simply on jealous fear or on solid fact, I was glad to have this opportunity of sounding him.

- 'Is Miss Yorke gone?' he asked in surprise, breaking away from the subject we were discussing as I turned the corner of the street.
- 'Yes,' said I. 'I expect she left by the front of the house. At any rate, I am not wanted, now she has Mr. Sherridan to take care of her.'

'Mr. Sherridan?' he repeated in a tone of interrogation.

'The gentleman she is to marry,' I explained.

He stopped involuntarily for an instant; then, after a couple of paces, he said in a low tone:

'I did not know Miss Yorke was engaged; indeed——' He checked himself abruptly.

'She led you to believe that she should never marry,' I hinted. 'Well, until this afternoon she had reason to believe that she should never marry Mr. Sherridan. I suppose girls all feel that they can never love but one—until they love another.'

'Miss Yorke is not an ordinary girl in any sense,' he replied quietly. 'There is a fidelity of purpose in her character which, under certain conditions, would lead to heroic self-sacrifice. I saw that Miss Yorke had loved and lost, but I saw not less clearly that she would never love again.'

'Then, thank Heaven for giving back her lost love!' said I with fervour. 'For what would life be without love?' and, remembering his order, I added, 'to a woman.'

'Or to man, either.'

I was surprised to hear him, a Catholic priest, say this; but my thought at that moment turning to the mill-house and Mrs. Bailey with a pathetic tenderness, I assented.

'That is true; love is necessary to us all. What could we put in its place?'

'Nothing,' said he gravely—'nothing, except what we call self-sacrifice, and that is nothing but love in a higher form—altruism.'

'Altruism!—would you be good enough to give me the meaning of the word, sir?'

'Renunciation of self—the giving up of all we possess for the benefit of others the devotion of our lives, not to one or two, but to all the world.'

'Then, thank Heaven,' said I to myself, 'for saving me from altruism also.'

Perceiving by my manner that his views were distasteful to me, he had the good taste to drop altruism and turn the conversation, with the graceful facility of an accomplished talker, to music; and in this he astonished me, not less by his profound knowledge of the subject, than by the light and agreeable way in which he treated it: he was no longer the austere teacher of self-denial, but a most charming companion. We parted the best friends in the world; but I should not have been sorry to know that we were quit of each other for good and all, seeing that Jack had not overrated the influence such a man might have over a young woman of emotional temperament like Kitty.

I said nothing about him to Jack and Kitty when we met at supper, but suffered them to enjoy their notion that I had been paying attentions to Mrs. St. Vincent; but the figure of the handsome young priest haunted my memory, and stood out in my imagination like a warning spectre.

When Jack at last left us, Kitty, returning to me, her eyes swimming with happiness, threw her arms about my neck, and, laying her face against my shoulder, exclaimed:

- 'Oh, what should I do if I lost him again!'
- 'My dear,' I expostulated, 'why should such a thought come into your head at this time?'
- 'I don't know,' she replied softly, rocking herself slowly in my arms, 'unless it is that shadows will come with a great light.'
- 'It is half-past two,' I observed, to avoid further discussion.
- 'Poor uncle! and you have been yawning so terribly for the last hour.'

She kissed me with a laugh at my ex-

pense, and then again with tender affection, and we separated for the night.

But, tired as I was, I could not sleep for the misgivings that plagued me. Kitty, Jack, Yorke, the priest—all the dramatis persona came before me, and every one of them suggested some terrifying or gloomy possibility.

The remarkable accuracy with which Jack had conceived the character and motive of Mr. Justin O'Gorman caused me the greatest uneasiness.

'For if,' said I to myself, 'his conclusions are so just with regard to this man, they may be equally accurate with regard to Yorke, whose character he has had fuller opportunity of judging. He exonerates the curate from any participation in the crime, throwing the guilt upon Yorke and Roberts. But the evidence of Singleton is against Yorke, and not against Roberts, who seems only to be a tool in Yorke's hands. What

reason is there to doubt the justice of this evidence? None but Yorke's assertion that he was not the most guilty of the parties concerned. But what reliance is to be placed on that assertion? Would the man capable of committing theft and murder hesitate to tell a lie when it suited his purpose?

Before I fell asleep I had come to the dismal conviction that once more I had been led to a false conclusion by trusting my own judgment.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JACK LEARNS ALL WE HAVE TO TELL.

Happily the sight of Kitty's bright face at the breakfast-table, and her cheerful gossip, dispelled my lugubrious forebodings in a great measure, otherwise I should have come very badly out of the ordeal that waited on me.

When the breakfast things were removed, Kitty brought me my pipe and tobaccopouch, and, seating herself by my side, said:

'Jack is coming for me at twelve. We are going out together. There was no time

to talk to him last night upon serious matters. But I do not want to put it off a moment longer than I can help.'

'Of course, my dear, I shall not prevent you—but what is it you want to tell him?'

'I intend to tell him the truth, to confess my real motive for declining to be his wife.'

'But that necessitates confessing that we believed your father to be implicated in the crime at the Vicarage.'

'Why should we not confess it now that his innocence is proved?' she asked.

'True—but——' I demurred, bending over my pipe with a shake of the head, unable to proceed.

'It is a duty we owe my father,' she continued earnestly; 'we did him a great wrong to condemn him upon mere suspicion before we knew even whether he denied his guilt or not.'

'M-yes, but how are you going to explain the sandal-wood box affair?"

'That needs no explanation, dear, now that we know that the contents of the box were in the hands of someone else. Naturally Jack has said to me very little upon this subject, not knowing how deeply it affects me; but incidentally he told me that the will had been given up by that horrid curate. Always hoping that my father was guiltless, I had accounted to myself for the box coming into his possession innocently, before I heard that. I saw him on the racecourse that morning with his companion. His appearance, his wish that I should not know him, proved that he was living amongst the rough people who gain their living at these meetings. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the thief, having taken all that the box contained, purposely threw this box where it might be picked up by someone like my father, as a means of diverting the suspicion from himself, and fixing it where the police would first of all direct inquiry?

'That sounds plausible enough, to be sure.'

'Again, it has struck me from the first that, if my father committed the crime, it was a piece of folly little short of madness to give me the box, knowing that I was engaged to Jack, who might identify it.'

'That never occurred to me—if I had only thought of that!' said I.

'I wanted to tell you, dear,' said Kitty, laying her hand on my arm; 'I wanted to talk about this—to seek for some explanation that would remove this terrible dread. But you closed my lips—you would not speak nor let me speak; and that more than anything else made me believe my father guilty. You forced me to believe that you knew more than you dared to tell me. But that is past now, isn't it?

You will tell me all that you have concealed about him! When did you see him last ?

'On Saturday. It was then that he told me he was innocent of that awful crime.'

'Yet you told me nothing about it in your letter on Sunday. But you knew it was all in all to me—that my father's innocence is as dear to me as life itself. You knew that my heart was breaking under this great trouble, and still you would not speak.' Tears filled her sweet eyes, her voice trembled with emotion, and I knew not what to sav or do. 'And you let a day pass,' she continued with a sob, 'talking of everything but that which would have been most welcome to a daughter's ear, and when at last the truth escaped you it was not willingly.'

'Have patience with me, Kitty dear,' said I. 'You know well enough that I am not wantonly cruel, and I am not

altogether to blame for this. I have been guided by your father, and I think I must still submit to his guidance. Come, my dear Kitty, you shall tell me what I ought to do. On one hand you ask me to tell you all I know about your father, on the other hand he forbids me to tell anything. Which am I to obey?

She sat silent and absorbed in deep thought for two or three minutes; then she said, with perfect calm and slow, emphatic utterance:

- 'One thing you must tell me. To your own knowledge, has my father ever done that which should dishonour me?'
- 'Well, my dear,' said I, shuffling from the point, 'he has been mixed up with a queer lot.'
- 'That does not dishonour me,' Kitty replied sharply. 'To speak plainly, uncle, is it known to you that my father has committed a crime?'

This was an easier question to answer, for I had no proof of Yorke's guilt, and so I replied, without hesitation, 'No.'

'Then I will ask no more. I am content to know that he is innocent, to believe that he has some better motive than I can imagine for secrecy, and this strange aversion '

'He is not without deep affection for you, Kitty dear,' said I. 'He was deeply moved when I showed him your letter. Above all things, he wishes you to marry, and it may be he thinks it advisable that Jack shall not know of his existence while there is any doubt of the affair coming off.'

'But Jack shall know everything that I can tell him,' said she firmly. 'In this I shall take guidance from no one. My father may keep a secret from me, but I will keep none from my husband.'

Here was another vexatious combination. 'Now,' thought I, 'Jack will be down on

me. He'll want to know all that Kitty can't tell him, and how I'm to stand up against him, when I can barely hold my ground against Kitty, heaven only knows! And then all this comes from my confounded knack of opening my mouth too wide. If I had kept it resolutely shut from the beginning, as Yorke bade me, and refused to tell Kitty one word about her father, all this past trouble, and I fear a good deal more to come, would not have happened. And what good is there to counterbalance all this evil? Not a scrap, that I can see. Yorke's jeopardy is rather increased than lessened. Jack and Kitty, who might have been married and settled down comfortably long ago, have been sundered and made wretched, and their marriage is still uncertain; and as for me, I've been in a constant pickle from first to last. Yorke, if he could, would send me to Jericho; Kitty is vexed with me, and so

sore at heart that she can't give me a kind look, and I may safely expect to be badgered by Mr. Jack like a thief in the witness-box '

Doubtless the expression of my countenance was particularly deplorable at that moment, for Kitty, turning from the window, where she had been standing for some moments absorbed in thought, came quickly to me with an exclamation of pain and regret, and, seating herself on my knee, twined her arms round my neck, and begged me to forget anything she had said to grieve me. 'It is so hard to consider the feelings of others at the moment that one's own are hurt,' said she, and then, to give a livelier turn to the affair, she added in the rich brogue she had picked up, and taking my hand in hers: 'Sure, darlint, ye know that your Kitty loves you better than all the world, but one, and worships this hand that never touched her but in kindness.'

I vowed that I would never give another thought to the incident, and, declaring it was folly to let past clouds throw a gloom upon our spirits now that the sun had burst forth, I rose and lit my pipe in a cheerful spirit. 'But,' said I to myself, 'if ever a generous impulse leads me to let the cat out of the bag again, may I be shot!'

Jack came with a smart car for Kitty, and I did not see them again until tea-time. They were both in buoyant spirits: Kitty was quite herself again; there was not a sign of lurking anxiety in her face. The drive had done her a world of good; but more still was due to the feeling of hope and confidence which Jack had revived by his happy faculty of looking things straight in the face and discovering their brighter side. His manner with me was as kind and genial as usual, and he made no allusion whatever to my past lack of candour—nevertheless, I knew that it was a matter

which could not be passed over in silence, and, wishing to get through the unpleasant business as soon as possible, I opened the conversation that evening the minute after we had left Kitty at the stage-door.

- 'Well, Jack,' said I, 'you're going to give me a piece of your mind, I expect.'
 - 'What about, Dick?'
- 'Kitty has told you the reason why she broke off the engagement.'

He nodded

- 'And I dare say you think me wanting in feeling to have left that painful duty to her?
- 'On the contrary, I should have thought you wanting in feeling, and sense too, if you had breathed a word on a subject which she had such excellent reasons for concealing. She has told me all she knows about her father,' he added by way of explanation.
 - 'I may as well say at once,' said I, 'that

I can add nothing to your knowledge on that head.'

'That is understood, Dick. I should be very sorry to hear from your lips a single word that you considered it advisable to conceal from Kitty. You feel, perhaps, that between friends'—he slipped his hand through my arm and gave it a kindly nudge—'between men so well disposed towards each other as you and I are, there should be no reserve; but I couldn't have liked you, Dick, if you had betrayed Kitty's secret. It seems to me that throughout this business—a most trying and difficult one for a man of your character—you have acted both well and wisely.'

I was not less pleased with this handsome compliment than with the very unexpected escape from an awkward position. It was wonderful the effect this had on my spirits.

'Wait a bit, Jack,' said I; 'I feel as if we ought to have a good cigar;' and, leaving

him, I turned into the tobacconist's we were passing, and bought two Intimidads, for which the man made me pay two shillings —if he had asked me to pay ten I would have paid it.

'As for Kitty,' said Jack, when he had lit his cigar, 'it makes me choky to think of her devotion and loyalty. There's not such another girl in the world. Why, God bless me, Dick! a woman with a soul and conscience like hers could afford to have old Nick himself for a father'

It doesn't seem just in any case that the sins of the father should be visited on the children, I remarked.

'No, but they are. Women especially suffer. They're so ready to take our burdens on their shoulders. One thing bothers me a bit, Dick,' he continued, after a pause: 'I fear that Kitty even now is not quite convinced of her father's innocence.'

The same doubt had crossed my mind. VOL. III. 42

It seemed to me that if the restitution of the will had swept away every doubt as to her father's honesty, she would have confessed all to Jack at the first moment of their meeting, that latent dread had silenced her on this subject before she had learnt more from me, and that in asserting her belief in his guiltlessness her tone would have been exultant rather than tearful had no suspicion lingered.

'I fear,' Jack continued, 'that her heart, rather than her reason, exonerates him—that she believes him guiltless because it is a duty to honour her father.' After a little interval of silence he asked: 'Have you the notes that were given with the sandal-wood box?'

'No.

'That's a pity,' he explained, as though he were not quite certain of my veracity. 'For if the numbers of the stolen notes were taken we could prove that these were not in the lot. That might convince Kitty.'

'I gave them to Yorke, while I was still in doubt as to their origin, before Shepherd gave up the will.'

I could not tell by his manner whether he believed me or not. When he next spoke it was on another subject.

- When does the engagement here finish, do you know, Dick?' he asked.
 - 'At the end of the month for certain.'
- 'And this is the second. A full three weeks. I suppose after I have resided here a fortnight we could be married.'
 - 'I believe so.'
- 'Then Kitty shall be my wife before we leave Dublin,' said he in a tone of decision.

But that was not to be, for, as everyone knows, the Phœnix Theatre was burnt down on the night of September 2.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

KITTY SEES HER NEW HOME --- AND MRS. BAILEY.

The fire broke out about three o'clock in the morning. I was awoke by the cry of 'Fire!' in the street below, and, opening my eyes, found the room quite light and a red glare on the window-blind. Kitty cried to me the next moment in alarm from her room. We both thought the house we were in was in flames, but, on going to the window, I saw that we were quite safe, though the huge tongues of fire seemed to spring up directly behind the row of houses on the other side of the street. By the time I had shuffled on a few clothes, Kitty came to the door in

her dressing-gown. We were both terribly scared and excited by the shock. The noise in the street increased; there was a continued patter of feet, everyone crying 'Fire!' as if from exuberant delight in destruction. Throwing up the window, we saw a myriad of sparks whirling in the sky overhead, and here and there great flakes fell softly like snow in the street. Hearing our exclamations of alarm, Jack, who had run round from his hotel, called out to me; he would have called in vain if it had not been for Kitty-I should not have heard him above the clatter in the street, the roar of the flames, and the commotion in my own mind

'Is there any danger?' I asked. 'Ought we to pack up?'

'Not yet,' said he with a laugh, 'though I expect we shall all have to pack tomorrow. There's not the slightest danger, Kitty. It's worth while coming to the end

of the street; you get a magnificent view of it there.'

- 'Why, where is it?' asked Kitty.
- 'Don't you know? It's the theatre you were playing in last night.'

This brought Kitty's engagement to a sudden end, and, as there was now no reason for staying in Dublin, Jack proposed that Kitty should take possession of her future home at once.

'It's a little irregular, perhaps,' said he; but if the arrangement is convenient and agreeable to all of us, I see no objection to it on that account.'

Kitty was delighted with the idea. She was longing to see the mill-house of which I had written so glowingly, and, being quite as Bohemian in her tastes as Jack, regarded the irregularity rather as an inducement than otherwise, as it gave a certain dash of piquancy to the proceeding. Besides that, Jack had already propounded his notion for

a new comedy, in which Kitty's help was as indispensable as it had been in the production of 'The Blue-stocking'; and as they had settled that this work could only be begun in their new home, it was of vital importance that they should settle down in that home quickly, for Jack had now no other means of subsistence than a beggarly two guineas a day from the American company who were playing 'The Blue-stocking' in New York. These facts were brought forward to overcome any opposition on my part to the proposal: but, indeed, I was scarcely less eager than they for a foretaste of the home life and happiness which Kitty was to enjoy. And so on Saturday we left Dublin by the early morning mail, and, arriving at Chester in the afternoon, we found the trap at the station, with little Jimmy on the broad grin at the mare's head, Jack having telegraphed to Mrs. Bailey before starting.

And now it made my heart beat high

with joy to see Kitty's delight when Jack told her that this was to be her mare as soon as she could ride and drive it. She loved all animals dearly; but it seemed to her that she had never seen any creature so intelligent and beautiful as this mare. She talked nonsense to it in a coaxing tone, as she stroked its silky nose and patted its glossy neck.

Jack offered me the box-seat; but as past experience did not encourage me to take the reins again, I preferred to take the back-seat with little Jimmy.

'Is your mamma quite well, Jimmy?' I asked as soon as we were off.

'Yes, sir; and she told me to give her best respects to you; and I hope you're quite well, sir?'

A nicer, more well-behaved little lad I never saw in my life. He had the same fresh and healthy complexion as his mother, and his manners reflected her amiable dis-

position. I felt that I should have been glad to have had such a promising boy for my son, and was glad that I had recollected to buy him a pocket-knife with four blades and a corkscrew for a present, as well as a set of bog-wood ornaments for Mrs. Bailey.

We had left the main road, and Kitty was taking her first lesson in driving under Jack's instructions, her eyes flashing with excitement, her face flushed with pleasure.

'It is all right now,' said I to myself; 'in a very little while they will be married, and then all my cares will be over.' The reflection that when they were married I should not be wanted at the mill-house failed to depress me, for I was cheered by the hopeful presentiment that, somehow or other, though separated, I should never be far removed from her.

I observed that Jack, instead of taking the road that led through St. Botolph's, had turned down a by-lane, and this relieved me of some anxiety I had felt with regard to the possibility of meeting Yorke; for remote as the probability was of encountering him on the road, or of Kitty recognising her father under his altered appearance, the possibility existed.

This fear of an accidental meeting suggested to my mind the advisability of communicating with Yorke as quickly as possible; for headstrong and stubborn as he was in going his own way, I felt sure that he would get out of the neighbourhood for a certain time, at any rate when he knew how matters stood, and how necessary it was to Kitty's welfare that she should not discover his identity at this juncture.

These reflections were put an end to by a cry of delight from Kitty. We had reached the crest of the hill, whence the eye ranges over a vast expanse of beautiful country, now bathed in the mellow light of the setting sun, with the river like a silver thread

meandering through meadows and cornfields and dark patches of woodland: and there, in the prettiest spot on the scene, stood the mill-house, her future home, with its many gables, and a line of pale-blue smoke rising from its chimneys against the dark background of Moulsey Wood. I remembered how the first glimpse of Jack's house had gladdened my eyes; and I was not surprised that it blinded Kitty with a tear of joy to think that she was to live there with the man she loved.

She gave up the reins to Jack, asking him to take her home quickly; and the way in which he descended the hill and rattled over the rest of the road kept me from thinking of anything else but what it would be best to do in case of accident until we pulled up in safety before the porch and Mrs. Bailey. The good woman was beaming with smiles, and the very picture of neatness, with not a spot on

her snowy apron, albeit a most delicious savoury whiff told that she had something cooking in the kitchen for our dinner.

'We've taken you by surprise, Mrs. Bailey,' said Jack, after introducing Kitty.

'Not a bit of it, sir,' she replied, with a merry laugh. 'I've been expecting Miss Yorke ever since you set up her portrait on the mantelshelf, and when I got your telegram this morning, I says to myself, "Well, if these two visitors aren't Mr. Holderness and his niece, then Mr. Sherridan is not the sort of gentleman I take him for;" and to prove it, miss,' she added, turning to Kitty, 'I've prepared the room next to your uncle's for you.'

'I shall come to you when I want my fortune told,' said Kitty, smiling.

'No need of a conjurer to tell you that, miss,' said she with an arch look, and then, as Kitty left us to join Jack, who had strolled off to his favourite rose-bush, Mrs.

Bailey, dropping her voice to a confidential tone, said to me: 'Lord, Mr. Holderness, what a lovely young lady! and I see she gets her good looks from the mother's side, for she takes after you wonderfully. But, there! I'm forgetting my roast;' and off she bustled. I gave little Jimmy a shilling on the spot, and told him I had something else for him when the luggage came down from the station.

Jack had led Kitty into the garden, and, as I knew I was not wanted there, I went indoors, and after peeping into the diningroom, where the table with its snowy cloth and glittering glasses, and the side-board with its bunch of fresh-cut flowers and plates of fine ripe fruit, presented a picture to charm the eye of any artist, I was led by that delightful odour of cooking down the passage and into the kitchen, where Mrs. Bailey was basting something on a spit before the open wood-fire.

'I've come to see what you're going to give us for dinner,' said I.

'Now, that's just what I like, Mr. Holderness. For if a gentleman takes no interest in the kitchen, what pleasure can a woman find in getting a nice bit of dinner for him! Partridges, and fine fat ones they are. I've cooked a couple of brace; for after a long journey like that, it's a strange thing to me if you can't eat a bird apiece.'

The look of the birds, the smell of them, the prospect of sitting down to a whole bird, the sense of generous abundance, all of it together, in fact, exhilarated me to such a degree that I could not refrain from pinching Mrs. Bailey's plump arm, and, indeed, I might have gone farther if I had not at that moment heard Kitty's voice as she entered the house.

They were standing in the long room,

she and Jack, hand in hand, silent with happiness.

'There's a table, Kitty,' said I, rubbing my hands in glee. 'You could seat twenty at it.'

'Mrs. Bailey seems to have prepared for as many, said Kitty, glancing at the laden side-board.

'She's a good, comfortable soul,' said Jack, 'with hospitable views as large as her heart.'

'And look at the legs,' said I, raising the table-cloth, and thinking still of the table, 'what proportions, what grace combined with strength! All solid oak.' I could not see what there was to laugh at in this observation, but seemingly Jack found it difficult to keep his countenance. However, I was too enthusiastic to regard interruption, and continued: 'There's a fireplace, too! See the seats in the chimney-corner, and the irons to rest the legs on. Fancy the

ruddy, comfortable glow on the polished beams and oak panels when the fire is lit!'

'And that pretty creeper peeping in at the window,' said Kitty, her eyes straying round the room.

'Yes, but picture it about Christmas time,' said I with enthusiasm, 'when the windows are all tightly closed, and there's a rim of white snow on the casements, and you come in hungry from a drive through the hard lanes, and there's a delicious smell like this about. But come, my dear, let me show you your room, for the dinner will be dished in a minute, and it would be a shame to keep it waiting.' I took her up and showed her her room next to mine, which Mrs. Bailey had smartened up, the very ideal of sweetness and cleanliness and comfort, and bade her be quick; but she was still standing by the window looking down at the rushing mill-stream when I returned from brushing my hair.

'It is like a dream,' she said, 'and I fear every minute to wake and find it all vanished.'

Recalling these words the next morning as I was dressing, I said to myself that nothing could be more terrible than the realization of her fear. And yet it was as likely as not to happen. For what if Yorke, reading that the theatre had been burnt down, should come over on some pretence with a view to learning from me whether Kitty was safe? Would Kitty fail to recognise in Mr. Shuttle the man she had seen on the racecourse? Would not natural instinct aid her to penetrate his disguise and discover her father?

To prevent such a calamity I started off on foot for St. Botolph's as soon as Jack and Kitty were out of sight, they having gone in the trap towards Moulsey. Behind Jack's sharp-trotting mare, the distance had seemed nothing at all; on foot it was a very different thing. I fancied I should never reach the Vicarage, and a hotter, dustier, more uninteresting road I thought I had never travelled. It was just upon twelve as I passed the church, dusty and dead-beat. The anthem was being sung; everyone was in church—that is, all respectable people: I could not have chosen a better time for calling on Yorke. That was some consolation.

As I turned the corner and came in sight of the Vicarage, I perceived a couple of disreputable-looking vagabonds peering through the front-gate. One of them turned, and, catching sight of me, nudged his companion, and the two, quitting the gate, slouched towards me, their hands in their pockets. They passed me, one with a twig in his mouth keeping his eyes before him, giving me a sharp furtive glance. I stopped and looked back before going to the Vicarage-gate; they were rounding the

corner of Love Lane, and both, in turning, shot another glance at me. I knew at once they were a couple of Singleton's detectives set to watch the Vicarage, and observe all who went in and came out.

I rang the bell. After waiting a few minutes, I saw a man coming towards the gate, who assuredly was neither Yorke nor the curate. He was a little, shrivelled, bent old fellow in a sleeved waistcoat and a blue gardener's apron. 'This, then,' said I to myself, 'is the mysterious Roberts, playing the part of a domestic servant.' But it seemed to me impossible that a man so old and decrepit could have done the murder; yet there was sinewy strength in his hands, tanned and hairy on the back, and the crooked bony fingers looked capable of strangling a man; and when he raised his bent head and faced me I found cruelty enough in the wrinkled and puckered-up mouth, and sufficient cunning in the beady

eyes under their bristling and overhanging brows to justify the conclusion that he had killed the old Vicar.

'Is Mr. Shuttle at home?' I asked.

After regarding me in suspicion for a moment, he asked me what I wanted, and put his hand to his ear, pretending deafness as an excuse for not replying directly to my question.

- 'Mr. Shuttle—is he at home?' I repeated, raising my voice.
- 'What's yer name?' he asked. 'Speak up, I'm hard of hearing.'
- 'Holderness,' I answered in a still higher tone.
- 'All right,' said he, his wrinkled face twisting into a grin as he pulled a key from his pocket and opened the gate.

I pushed through, and left him carefully locking it. Coming to the lawn, I stopped for an instant in astonishment, for there, walking slowly towards the house with his

hands behind him, was the curate in his long frock-coat and his flat-crowned felt hat drawn down to the tips of his ears. I had been led to understand that he was hiding in London; his return to the Vicarage showed either that his story of robbing Shuttle was a falsehood, or that he possessed an amount of courage with which we had not credited him. But these speculations were abruptly upset by the man turning on his heel and discovering the fact that he was not Mr. Shepherd, but Bob Yorke.

CHAPTER XL.

KITTY'S FATHER PLAYS ANOTHER PART.

It was certainly a clever make-up; the curate's gait, the bend in the shoulders, the manner of laying one hand in the other behind his back, and of holding them before him at other times, like a pair of limp fins, the set of his head, and all the details of his dress were wonderfully imitated; but the futility of this mummery, which seemed the result of vanity—Yorke had always prided himself in the old days on his ability in making up for the stage—rather than of any serious intention to evade recognition, disgusted me.

'What's the meaning of this masquerade?'
I asked angrily, in a low tone.

'I've got to use my wits,' he replied, leading me into the library; 'things are getting a bit warm.'

'Your wits!' said I contemptuously; 'it looks as if you had lost them, to think of diverting suspicion by changing your make-up every other day. It is just the thing to convince anyone of your real character.'

'Oh, that is your opinion! It's good to get impartial criticism. But that's not what you have come to give me. You've come to give me some advice, I dare say.'

His sarcastic tone irritated me; but, subduing that as well as I could, I replied:

'I have come to advise you—not for your own sake, you may be pretty sure, but for Kitty's. You know the theatre is burned down.'

'Three o'clock Friday morning; no one injured.'

'I thought you might feel anxious about her, all the same,' said I, nettled by his tone of indifference. 'And it was to prevent you coming to the mill-house for information that I have walked all this distance. Kitty is there.'

He nodded, as if this fact were known to him. However, not to be discouraged, I tried to stir him from his apathetic condition by narrating fully all that had happened, and exposing the true position of affairs. Not a single word of mine altered his impassive attitude. He listened in exasperating silence, seated by the table, slowly tracing the pattern of the table-cover with the end of a penholder, and never once raised his eyes.

'I have shown you,' said I, in recapitulation, 'that Shepherd has betrayed you, and, as a proof, you will find the will gone from the trunk in which you kept it. Kitty has been induced to believe that you are innocent, though even Mr. Sherridan perceives a lingering doubt in her mind. I have shown you that if you take but the simple precaution of leaving England for a few weeks she will be married to Mr. Sherridan. and, on the other hand, that if she discovers that you are the man whom Sherridan and Singleton and all who know the facts regard as a murderer and a thief, she is likely to accept the bait laid for her by the priest I spoke of. And now,' said I in conclusion, 'if you have one spark of affection for your daughter, one grain of common-sense and prudence, you will throw up this silly masquerading game and put the Channel between yourself and the men who, as I have proved, are hunting you down to an infamous end'

- 'You have proved nothing, Dick,' said he calmly, still regarding the table-cloth.
- 'Well,' said I, 'if you will believe the evidence of your own eyes, you have only

to go outside the walls of that garden to be convinced; Singleton's spies are out there. I saw them.'

This touched him. He was on the alert in an instant.

'What spies?' he asked sharply, fixing me with his eyes, which were keen enough with awakened energy now.

'A couple of fellows were looking through the gate as I came up. They sneaked down Love Lane when they saw me. But only by the way they regarded me I could see they were detectives.'

'What sort of fellows were these detectives?' he asked quickly.

'Why, just such a pair of blackguards as you and your pal looked at Chester Races.'

'You say they turned down Love Lane,' he said, rising; and before I had finished my reply he stepped outside and disappeared.

Following quickly to the window, I per-

ceived him giving hurried directions to Roberts in a tone that was inaudible to me, clearly showing that the man's deafness was, as I suspected, assumed, probably to make me raise my voice, and give Yorke warning. When he had taken Yorke's instructions, the old man slipped off nimbly by the walk in the shrubbery leading to the out-houses, which, as I have said, opened on to Love Lane.

'It's getting warmer and warmer,' said Yorke, as he came back to me—'that is, if you have not discovered another mare's nest.'

He took up his clerical hat, which he had removed on sitting down, put it on carefully, and, going to the window, looked out with evident anxiety towards the shrubbery walk. I stood behind him, looking in the same direction with growing anxiety. For three or four minutes we waited in silent suspense; then Roberts, coming from the walk at a brisk pace, nodded, and jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Love Lane.

- 'What did I tell you?' I asked, not without a little exultation.
- 'I must see for myself,' replied Yorke, creasing his brows. 'Come on.'

We went down to the gate, which he opened with a key of his own, and we passed out into the road; there he at once assumed all the characteristic mannerisms of the curate as he accompanied me in the direction of Love Lane.

'I shall stop at the corner,' said he.
'You will shake hands with me; but mind you don't look down the lane.'

And at the corner of Love Lane we stopped, Yorke, who had taken the outside of the path, commanding an uninterrupted view down the lane as he turned to give me his hand.

'I see them,' said he, maintaining the

curate's mannerism, but speaking in a low tone as if he were simply confiding some item of local gossip; 'one has ostler's leggings, the other a velveteen jacket, both wearing deer-stalker hats.'

How he could have noted all these facts in the single cursory glance he cast down the turning passed my comprehension, but the brief description was sufficient to identify them.

- 'Those are the fellows,' said I.
- 'This is certainly getting warm,' he said, wagging his head, with Shepherd's bland smile. 'They're not ordinary loafers, and they are sitting on the bank exactly opposite the side-gate. It looks as if you were right for once.'
- 'Then, now you see your danger, you'll get out of the country at once.'
- 'I don't know. I must know a little more about these gentry first. It won't do to bolt out of cover in the very teeth of the

hounds. And so,' raising his voice to a sufficiently audible pitch, 'good-bye, my deah Mr. Holderness; so glad to have seen you, so grateful for your little visit.'

With a parting shake of the hand he left me, and I had no option but to pursue my course. When I glanced back at the angle of the road, Yorke was going into the Vicarage, and a couple of deerstalker hats, just above the paling at the corner of the lane, showed me that the two men had come up there, and were doubtless watching me out of sight.

I was now not without hope that Yorke would profit by this warning; and the consciousness of having done my duty certainly gave me some satisfaction as I trudged homewards, but that which comforted me still more was the offer of a lift from a kind-hearted young farmer, who saw me painfully plodding along in the shade of the hedge, with my hat in my hand. I

never enjoyed a drive more in my life, and, thanks to the time saved by this conveyance, I reached the mill ten minutes before Jack and Kitty returned, which obviated lying to the extent which would otherwise have been necessary, for I calculated that afoot I could not have got home before three o'clock, and then in what a condition to lie with a bold face may be easily conceived.

Directly after breakfast the next morning, Kitty with a notebook and pencil, and Jack with a vard-measure, went systematically through all the rooms, making an inventory of the things they required to make the house home-like — a 'property plot,' they called it, and a most enjoyable occupation this was, to judge by their laughter and the happiness that glowed in their faces. Then, after an early lunch, we drove over to Chester, where the curtains and things were to be bought. Kitty held the reins,

and drove in a manner that won Jack's thorough approval; but I must say the pace was too fast for me, and the way in which she would pass other vehicles on the road at full speed made me wince in apprehension of collision. The slightest shock, I kept thinking, would be sufficient to shoot one off into the road, if at that moment he happened to loosen his hold upon the back of his slippery seat.

'Which way, Jack dear?' she asked, as we sighted the cross-road.

'Right,' replied Jack; 'the other leads through St. Botolph's—could not very well pass The Cedars without calling on the Strongs, and we have no time for that to-day.'

'But we will go there to-morrow,' said Kitty. 'The Admiral and I got on very well together, and—and I want to know Miss Strong.'

When we drove into the town, Kitty,

who had given up the reins, asked Jack to stop at a hairdresser's; and as she could not let either him or me purchase what she needed, we suffered her to go into the shop alone. While Jack was standing by the side of the trap, chatting idly with me, Mr. Feverell, coming down the street, caught sight of him and stopped.

'I wanted to see you, Mr. Sherridan,' said he; 'can you tell me if Mr. Shuttle has any intention of purchasing the Vicarage?'

'I can't tell you. But I should say it is highly improbable. I am very sorry we let him have the place.'

'He seems to be a peculiar character, to be sure,' said the auctioneer with a smile, 'and there are some nasty rumours floating about. However, we knew nothing of them when we let the house, and the security we hold insures us against loss. It would have been folly to refuse his offer. However, I

am to understand that, at the expiration of his term, the house will be in the market. I've a client——'

'One moment, Feverell. I may as well tell you at once that the Vicarage is no longer my property. You will probably hear from my solicitor in a few days. In the meantime, if there is any chance of selling the property, you had better speak to Admiral Strong on the matter—he is the owner now.'

'Strange, he never said a word about it to me when we met an hour ago; and there's not much reserve about the Admiral. For one thing, he seems to be altogether taken up with the investigation of the crime there. I am told,' he added in a tentative tone, 'that he has employed Singleton to hunt down the criminal party.'

'Indeed,' said cautious Jack; 'do you know Singleton?'

'Not personally, but I wish I did. A

wonderful man, from what I hear. One thing is clear—if Shuttle's the man he's hunting down, we may expect to hear that he's shifted his residence to the county gaol before long. The place is watched day and night, I'm told.'

'Perhaps Shuttle will take alarm and bolt,' I suggested.

'No fear, sir. I saw him standing at the gate as I drove in this morning, chipping a stick, with that big gray Yankee felt hat of his on the back of his head, looking as innocent as you, sir, and as ignorant of danger.'

Kitty, coming from the shop, put an end to the gossip. 'Was Yorke mad?' I asked myself. He was still lingering sluggishly at the Vicarage: and the only result of my persuasion was that he had abandoned the fatuous idea of passing himself off as the curate, and reassumed his Chicago character.

Our next stopping-place was the Registry Office. I stayed by the mare's head while Kitty and Jack went in—Kitty looking a little awed by the gravity of this preliminary step to her marriage. But her eyes were sparkling, and her cheek flushed with blushing pleasure when they came out.

'In fifteen days we shall be married,' said Jack exultingly as he took the rein from my hand.

'Fifteen days,' said I to myself. 'Will Yorke escape discovery so long?'

CHAPTER XLI.

A SKIRMISH WITH THE ADMIRAL.

We went home from Chester laden with parcels, and more followed later on by the carrier; and but for my vexation of spirit and depressing anxiety with regard to Yorke, I should have been as happy as Jack and Kitty the next morning, when all the packets were opened in the long room, the contents laid out, and the effect of the new curtains and rugs and carpets tried by temporary display in the places they were intended for. All this was quite a new experience for Kitty, who had never yet had a real home of her own. She was eager to

begin the necessary fitting and making up of the draperies, and reluctantly put off this fascinating business to the following day, in order that her visit should be paid to the Strongs after lunch.

Clouds threatened rain, but that did not prevent Kitty arraying herself in her very best. Charming indeed she looked when she came down from her lengthy toilette, and the conviction that she looked nice gave a certain dignity to her carriage, which, together with her high-heeled boots, added a good inch to her stature, and gave her the air of a little duchess. Having a new and remarkably tight-fitting pair of gloves on, she suffered Jack to drive, but that allowed her to talk more freely, and full of lively chat they both were all the way. The prospect of meeting Jack's fine friends in no way damped her spirits. It was not a difficulty of that kind which could intimidate her.

'If I am good enough for Jack, I'm good enough for Jack's friends,' she had said to me when I had hinted something about putting on our best manners as well as our best dress for the visit. 'And as I have won his love without one effort, it is not likely I shall play a part to please his friends. They shall like me for myself or not at all.

Jack took the St. Botolph Road, and as we passed the Vicarage I trembled lest Yorke should be whittling his stick at the gate, as Mr. Feverell had seen him the day before, and from a spirit of bravado or sheer indifference refrain from moving on our approach. Happily this fear was not realized. There was no one at the gate, nor anyone that I could detect in the vicinity, except a nursemaid with a perambulator

We passed the house without any comment to direct Kitty's attention to it, and a couple of minutes after we pulled up before The Cedars.

We found the Admiral in his garden coat, trimming the yew hedge with a pair of shears.

'Miss Kitty,' said he, offering his hand,
'I'm honestly glad to see you. Jack
couldn't have brought a more acceptable
excuse for having forsaken us so long. I
forgive you, Jack, and there's t'other hand
for you. But,' he continued, grasping my
hand in turn, 'I'm afraid by the cut of your
jib, Mr. Politeful, you intend this for a
ceremonious visit. But that won't do.
Ten minutes' chat about nothing won't
satisfy us. I've broken bread with you,
Miss Kitty, and you will have to repay the
compliment.'

He continued in this style as he led us to the house, where we were met on the threshold by Miss Strong, to whom he at once introduced Kitty. 'Well, my dear,' said he, 'this is Miss Yorke, though I needn't tell you that, for besides seeing her on the stage you've heard my praises, and may now learn by your own senses that no one but she could merit 'em.'

The two young women regarded each other keenly as he spoke, and then, as if moved by mutual impulse to atone for past prejudice, each held out both hands to the other, and they embraced affectionately.

The next half-hour or so was occupied in casting anchor, as the Admiral put it, and not a word was said upon the subject which I was most anxious to hear discussed until we had taken tea, when Miss Strong said:

'Oh, Mr. Sherridan, I have a letter from Mr. Shepherd to show you—a love-letter, depicting at greater length the charms of that living in the Essex marshes, and formally offering his hand. It is quite too funny!' Then, turning to Kitty, she added:

'You have heard of the comedy in which we made that miserable young man play a part.'

'I have no reason to find fault with your comedy, Mr. Jack,' said the Admiral, 'but to make it complete you should have tacked on another act and brought that vagabond parson to the gallows, or penal servitude for life at least. Now, Miss Kitty, we've heard that you lent a generous helping hand to the production of t'other play: cannot you suggest some method of punishing the villain according to his deserts, and satisfying what I believe you call "poetical justice"?

'I should certainly marry Miss Strong to somebody particularly nice to begin with,' suggested Kitty, laying her hand on the arm of her new friend.

'Well, I think that arrangement is already made—eh, Nell?' said the Admiral, with a pleasant laugh. 'You may put

down the name of Captain Dysart for that part. A fine, honest man, after my own heart,' he added, turning to Jack. 'When he heard that we had lost our fortune, he candidly told us that he couldn't afford to marry my Nell; but now that's all altered, and we look to see him here in a day or two. Well. Miss Kitty, what punishment would you next inflict on the rascal?'

'Why, then, I would condemn him to live alone in the Essex marshes.'

· To be sure, that would be punishment enough for a man with a generous soul and a love of checrful company; but I fancy this curate would only regret the loss of my Nell as a cheap servant, and would be perfectly content with solitude if he succeeds in swindling the public as successfully as other peddling clerics who do not blush to advertise their traffic. Now, I had a better notion than that. I would have had Nell appoint a meeting in some snug corner of the garden, where I could be hid up with an end of tarred rope about an inch thick and two foot and a half long, and then she should have led him on to lay his hand on her, when out I come with myblo od well up, and baste him down with the rope-end till the hemp gave out. But Nell's a bit squeamish about the part she has to play, which is, perhaps, not altogether consistent with maidenly reserve, and, after all, a thrashing is not good enough for such a rascal.'

'I should say that the punishment met the justice of such a case,' said Jack with a laugh, 'considering that he has got the will for us.'

'Not a bit of it, Mr. Jack. He'd get over his welting in three weeks or a month, and be never a penny the better for it. As for getting us the will, he simply gave up what was no longer of any use to him, and got well paid for it. And that is what galls me again, to think that five hundred pounds of my money is to be paid to that rascal for having robbed me.'

'You still maintain that he is the real culprit, sir?' I ventured to say, inspired by that one gleam of hope.

'Maintain it! ay, that I will, to the last. I will stick to my colours though the evidence leave never a leg to stand on, and I have to fight it out, like old Benbow, on my stumps.'

'Then you have but little faith in Singleton,' said Jack, highly amused by the Admiral's anger, and seeking to provoke him still further.

'Singleton! Why, he's another thief, and but a shade or two less deeply dyed than t'other. He takes one five hundred, Shepherd the other—a division of plunder worthy of such a pair. What has he done since he gave up the will and drew my note for the reward? Nothing. He's got all

he was after, and doesn't intend to waste more time on the business.'

'I hope with all my heart you are right,' said Jack, 'for I've blamed myself for harbouring a couple of rogues in the Vicarage through want of proper forethought.'

'You need trouble yourself no further on that point, Mr. Jack. For I give you my word Shuttle is blameless. I caught sight of him in the orchard when I went to have a look at the gun this morning, and, just for the sake of argument, I hailed him and bade him know that he looked more like a thief than a horse, and gave him other like pieces of my mind. Thereupon he opened fire, and the way he gave me blow for blow, and stood to his guns, convinces me that he's as honest a man as ever breathed.'

This so delighted me that, smacking my legs, I burst into a fit of laughter, which continued until the Admiral, somewhat ruffled by my mirth, asked me brusquely

whether I considered his conduct particularly ridiculous, or what the dickens it was that tickled me. Expecting nothing less than a broadside to my own account, I became grave in a moment, assuring the Admiral that I found nothing ludicrous in his behaviour, and was merely smiling at the error a professional detective had fallen into. Then I asked him if he could account for the portraits of Mr. Shuttle in various disguises, which I was told Singleton had shown to Mr. Shepherd.

Why, that's as plain to me as the smile on your face, Mr. Sarcastic, and be d--d to you! he added, dropping his voice to a tone that could not be heard by the ladies at the other end of the room. 'Tis a lie of Shepherd's or a lie of Singleton's, and whether it's one or whether it's the other that lied it matters not two straws, for we know they are rascals, the pair of 'em.'

'Naturally,' said Jack, in his quiet, deli-

berate tone, 'Singleton, gauging Shepherd's character, would offer him a pretext for restoring the will without implicating himself.'

'And naturally,' chimed in the Admiral, 'such a villain as Shepherd would jump at any means for diverting suspicion from himself, and be only too happy to bring anyone to the gallows to keep his own neck out of the halter. And look you, Mr. Jack-for you seem to have some glimmerings of reason in your head—if this story of finding the will in Mr. Shuttle's box was true, do you think Singleton, with another thousand pounds in view, would hesitate a moment to obtain a warrant and apprehend the Yank on the parson's evidence, backed by the past record he professes to have against him?'

'Why, certainly not!' I exclaimed in honest exultation.

'Why, certainly not!' echoed the Admiral, mimicking my tone and scowling at me, for

I believe he fancied I spoke in irony, and was ridiculing his theory; 'and the proof that it is "certainly not" is that Shepherd is afraid to show his face in the neighbourhood, and Singleton has abandoned the case '

'Did you answer that letter!' Kitty asked Miss Strong.

· No: my father wished me to keep him in a state of uncertainty as long as possible.'

'Av, my dear: and why should we waste so much as a drop of ink to satisfy him? He has written to me for the payment of the bills he bought up, but I haven't answered that request, and I don't intend to, either. If he had Nell's answer, and my money for those bills, he would be off and out of danger to-morrow. But while there's the barest possibility of getting money, avarice will keep him within our reach, and who knows but that something yet may turn up to convict him? You may think, Mr. Smirker' (this to me), 'that my faith is about as waterlogged as my wisdom, but I'll tell you this: I have a mighty belief in the justice of Providence.'

'Amen,' said I, with the devout hope that his conclusions might be verified and the curate be found guilty. But it seemed as though the Admiral was bound to misconstrue my most innocent utterance, for, turning on me with another black look, he said:

'You mean to hint that I've preached enough by clapping in your Amen, eh? You're coming on well. When we first met you couldn't say "bo" to a goose, but I thought I should draw you out if we only rubbed together a bit. I like you all the better for it; but if you would show your guns and fight a little more openly, with not quite so much of this sarcasm and sly double-meaning, I should love you more.'

Jack dropped his arms on his knees, and,

bending his head, bit his lips to keep from laughing, for he knew well enough how guiltless I was of employing either sarcasm or double-meaning.

'And now, Mr. Jack,' said the Admiral, after a pause, 'tell me, have you heard from your lawyer?'

Not yet. They do nothing in a hurry. But I suppose he has arranged with your solicitor respecting supplies?'

'That's all right, my boy; I've money in my pocket, and can meet a beggar now without looking up in the air, and calling to mind all that your parsimonious philanthropists have prated about the sin of indiscriminate charity. With regard to the property, I expect you will stand as stiffly on justice as I did.'

Jack nodded.

'But you will bear in mind, my lad, that there were certain debts which I told you honestly I didn't intend to pay you.' 'Yes; and the estate is less by some hundreds than when it came into my hands. Those hundreds I intend, with equal honesty of purpose, to stick to.'

'Bravo, give and take.' The Admiral shook hands. 'I've bid my man dispose of one half of the property in such a manner that no one but you can touch a farthing. There it is for you; and if you don't like it, you may leave it. Not a farthing of it will I touch. As for the legal transfer, that will be made in due time, I dare say, but I care not when, so that I have a sovereign or two in my pocket. And now if I could only have my way with that parson! But there, as he's in league with Singleton, we may as lief expect to see one as t'other.'

Curiously enough, at that very moment a servant crossed the room, and said:

'If you please, sir, Mr. Singleton wishes to see you.'

CHAPTER XLII.

THE NET BEGINS TO CLOSE.

When the Admiral turned the conversation to the question of property, Miss Strong rose and went with Kitty into the adjoining room to join Miss Forsyth. Thus, when the servant brought Singleton's message, there was no one else in the room but the Admiral, Jack, and I.

'Let Mr. Singleton come in here,' said the Admiral, adding, as he turned to us: 'Amongst us we may discover what new tactics he is upon.'

Singleton entered the room, smart and clean-cut as ever, hat in hand, and stopped on

the threshold to make a bow. Then, closing the door with instinctive care and silence, he crossed and took the chair indicated by the Admiral.

'I dare say you are surprised to see me again so soon?' he said.

'So soon!' exclaimed the Admiral; 'you've delayed showing yourself so long that I gave up all expectation of ever seeing you again. Well, what's in the wind now?'

'I have met these gentlemen before. I suppose I may speak with perfect confidence in their secrecy?' said Mr. Singleton, fixing his eye particularly on me.

'As much as in mine. I have no secrets from them. Now get to work, if you please.'

- 'Have you seen Mr. Shuttle lately?'
- 'This morning.'
- 'He is still at the Vicarage?'
- 'He is.'
- 'And Mr. Shepherd—have you seen him since I was here last?'

- You have not heard of his being seen in the neighbourhood?
- No, I have not; and I warrant you know more about him than I do.'
- 'Possibly,' Mr. Singleton replied, stroking his chin reflectively. 'May I ask you, sir, if he has applied to you for the payment of certain bills of yours in his possession?'
- 'He has: and I don't intend to pay 'em until I am compelled.'
- 'I'm glad to hear you say so, sir. I must beg you to keep that resolution. Witnesses, especially clerical witnesses, are reluctant to appear in the witness-box—can't stand cross-examination, and it is of the utmost importance that we should be able to lay our hands on him with a subpœna at any moment.'
- 'I wager he'd rather sacrifice those bills than submit to such a raking fire as a counsel could turn on him. But look you here, Mr.

[·] No.

Ferret, if you are so precious anxious to keep him within arm's reach, what the dickens did you pay him that five hundred for?'

'I did not pay him,' replied Singleton softly, with a lengthy shake of the head.

'You told me that you had given him a cheque in exchange for the will,'

'And I did. But the cheque was dishonoured. And there will be no deposit in the bank to meet that cheque until this affair is wound up satisfactorily.'

'Gammon! You could have obtained a warrant to apprehend him the day he showed that the will was in his possession.'

'Which would have suited Mr. Shuttle down to the ground. And while we were trying to get a conviction against Mr. Shepherd for unlawful possession, the murderer would have slipped through our fingers. That would not have been very much to our credit.'

'I should be very glad to hear of any

proceeding that would,' said the Admiral pointedly.

Singleton smiled, put his hand in his breast-pocket and brought out a small flat parcel, removed the clastic band that bound it, unfolded the paper with loving care, and exposed an oblong piece of wood. My heart was in my mouth, for at the first glance I recognised the carving upon it and the colour.

'Have you seen that before?' he asked, putting it in the Admiral's hand. 'Smell it,' he added, as the Admiral turned it over, clearly unable to make out what it was.

'There's a sort of a spicy smell about it,' said the Admiral, passing it on to Jack.

'It is sandal-wood,' said Singleton; 'and part of the box which contained the will and other papers. The rest of the box is at home. I took it to pieces for convenience, and brought that to convince you on some points which may induce you to give us more

assistance than you have shown yourself ready to accord. Above all things, it may show you the advisability of concealing your hand from Mr. Shuttle.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'I was not a hundred yards from you this morning when you roundly accused Mr. Shuttle of being a thief, adding certain facts which it was necessary should be concealed. You keep your front-gate unlocked, and there is a most convenient summer-house at the bottom of your paddock. That is why I am yet rather anxious to know if Mr. Shuttle still stays at the Vicarage.'

'Well, I only hope that you may prove yourself as honest as Shuttle,' said the Admiral, unshaken in his faith.

'I hope so also. Now, gentlemen, to return to this box,' continued Singleton, as he carefully enveloped the box end. 'I was at Chester at the time this crime was committed, watching a fraudulent jockey on

behalf of Lord ——, and I mixed with the seum of the meeting—not in this get-up, you may be sure. On the last day of the meeting I heard that a couple of card-sharpers had boasted that they could hang the murderer if they chose. If I had wished to occupy myself in this affair, it would have been too late to find the men, who had cleared out with the rest of the roughs. I should probably have taken no more notice of this rumour but that by a curious accident this sandal-wood box fell into my hands at Nottingham.'

'How did it fall into your hands?' asked the Admiral. 'I suppose it did not rain sandal-wood boxes?'

'I got it,' replied Singleton, 'from the man who now calls himself Shuttle.'

I glanced with terrible dread towards the adjoining room, and drew a deep breath of relief to find that the door was closed.

'I had seen him at Chester. I've had

my eye on him for years; and, recollecting the rumours I had heard regarding the two sharpers who hinted at knowing the murderer, I surmised that they had been confederates with him in some sharping operations at the races, and had discovered his secret. I did not consider it worth while, however, to go into the business until I saw your advertisement, sir, in the papers. Then it occurred to me that something might be done by offering a big price for evidence; the witnesses who were not likely to come forward for nothing might be drawn by the offer of a large reward. You were good enough to accept my proposal, and I had the advertisement published in all the papers read by turf men of the lower class. result has answered my expectations. got my witnesses; they were in Chancery Lane when I turned up at my office this morning at nine o'clock, and I have brought them down with me.'

- 'To identify the criminal,' said Jack.
- 'Precisely, sir.'
- 'What the plague is the use of all this beating up,' asked the Admiral, 'if they find it was Shuttle?'

'That is exactly what they cannot or will not say; it is to prove whether it was Shuttle that I have brought them here. Their evidence amounts simply to this: about daybreak on June 12 they were tramping into Chester. Famished with hunger and parched with thirst, they thought it possible that an open window in the Vicarage might give them access to the larder. They scaled the wall, and were making their way through the shrubbery, when they caught sight of a man carrying a dead body on his shoulder. They beat a retreat into the stable yard and concealed themselves in a woodhouse. Shortly afterwards they perceived the man, bent under his burden, come into the vard

and cross to the well. Then he threw down the body, attached the chain to it, and lowered it into the well. When this was done he replaced the chain and withdrew; and my men made their escape by the gate opening into Love Lane. Now, during the time that the man was disposing of the dead body the witnesses had ample opportunity to observe his features and general appearance, and both are confident that they should recognise him again amongst a thousand.'

'Instead of bringing them down here, you would have done better to set them face to face with your friend Mr. Shepherd,' growled the Admiral.

'That is a suggestion which I shall undoubtedly act upon, sir, when I find that my own suspicions are misplaced. At present I think they are not misplaced. I have a firm belief that my witnesses, although for obvious reasons they disclaim any knowledge of Shuttle, know well enough why I have

brought them down here. One of my men, who is watching the place, saw them hanging about the Vicarage on Sunday; and I think it is conclusive that if Shuttle had given them a liberal amount of hush-money they would never have come to me. However. I propose, with your assistance, to settle whether Shuttle is the man or not this evening.'

The Admiral promised he should have all the assistance he required.

'I am much obliged to you, sir,' said Singleton. 'As this identification is of enormous importance, I wish to make the test as thorough as possible. For that purpose I intend to place my witnesses in the shrubbery where they first saw the man carrying the body, and hope to make Mr. Shuttle place himself at the open window of the library in a twilight as nearly as possible resembling that in which they saw him standing there on the morning of June the

12th. If we left it to chance, we might watch for a week without any good result, but if one of you gentlemen would do me a favour I think we might pull it off successfully. May I ask if any of you are on visiting terms with Mr. Shuttle?

'You have called upon him once or twice about the loan of a book,' said Jack to me.

'The loan of a book!' cried Singleton in delight; 'that's the very thing. Will you be kind enough, sir, to call upon him again with the same purpose?'

'With pleasure,' I replied, only too glad of this opportunity to warn Yorke. 'I'll go at once.'

'Oh, no, no, no!' said Singleton, laying his hand on my arm as I rose. 'We shan't be ready for about an hour. The light, I reckon, will be just right then, and I shall have my witnesses in position. I myself will start you, and while you are going along on the outside of the wall I shall

make my way back to the Vicarage shrubbery by the inside. I may rely on you doing the best you can to bring Mr. Shuttle to the library window; this will be tolerably easy if you pretend you want a book. In all probability he will go into the room with you to seek it, and come out with you when you leave. You follow me, Mr. Holderness?

'Yes,' I faltered; 'I will do my best,' adding to myself, 'for Yorke and poor Kitty.'

· Well now, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I will go and look after my witnesses.'

'Where have you left 'em?' asked the Admiral.

'In the tool-house at the bottom of your garden, sir. I took the liberty to place them there under the care of my man before I came up.'

A light laugh came from the next room—Kitty's. The poor dear girl little knew how the net was closing round her father.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CARDSHARPERS RECOGNISE KITTY'S FATHER.

I was so completely unnerved by apprehension and excitement that I felt it would be quite impossible to conceal my trepidation from Kitty, and so, when Singleton had left the room, I rose, and pretending that I wished to ask him a question with regard to the duty I had to perform, hastily quitted the room. I did not attempt to overtake Singleton; I wanted only to be alone in the open air, where I might recover my self-possession. A misty rain was falling, the light was already fading, and the low hanging clouds deepened the surrounding gloom. As I stood at the

hall door looking out, Jack came to my side.

'The Admiral is explaining the situation in there,' said he in a low tone. 'Put on your overcoat, Dick; we may as well stroll down the garden and save Singleton the trouble of coming up to the house again.'

I did as he bade me. He himself put on his hat, and, linking his arm in mine kindly, walked slowly down the yew-bordered path to the gate.

'The tool-house is down there,' said I, when we reached the side-alley.

He nodded in silence, and led me on.

'Plenty of time,' said he, when we had passed the turning, and we said no more until we came to the gate. There he stopped, and, glancing round in a careless manner, spoke again: 'May as well go on to the Vicarage now,' said he; 'no need to wait for Singleton.'

Then for the first time it struck me that

Jack had fathomed the mystery of my reticence, and knew Shuttle was Kitty's father. His object in sending me to the Vicarage at once was clearly to put Yorke on his guard against exposing himself to the recognition of the witnesses who were now being taken through into the adjoining garden. I looked into his manly face; it wore a very grave expression now, but his eyes were full of generous sympathy, and I pressed his hand with an impulsive feeling of gratitude; then I hurried off, making as little noise as possible, that I might not attract the attention of the party on the other side of the wall.

I reached the Vicarage gate, and, panting for breath, pulled the bell-handle. It was loose in my hand. Singleton had cut the wire that there might be no interruption of his proceedings. I tried the lock; it was fastened and the key gone. I wasted no time—every second was precious—and, run-

ning on, turned down Love Lane with the purpose of getting in through the stable yard. The gates there were fastened. I lifted the latch and pushed in vain. How could I get at Yorke? The wails were too high for me to scale: it was useless to return to the front gate; I could not get through from the Admiral's paddock without being seen by the alert detective. How could I make Yorke hear! There was no bell or knocker on this side-gate. I dared not call to him; the only means I could think of was to knock at the gate with a stone on the chance of being heard by Yorke or Roberts, and this I did.

I rapped lightly, then waited: knocked a little louder, and waited again; then, growing desperate as the minutes flew by, leaving my purpose unattained, I struck the door heavily. The next minute, listening with my ear pressed to the door, I heard a bolt grating on the inside. Impatiently I waited the end of this slow process; at length the grating

ceased, and the gate began to gape. I pushed it vigorously, and as it gave found myself face to face with—Singleton.

He let me in without comment or question, merely raising his finger to enjoin silence, and closed the gate with care. Before me was the open courtyard with the well in the middle. Heavy drops falling from the eaves plashed at intervals upon the sodden earth. Three figures stood near the well, looking spectral enough in the misty rain and gray light. As we drew near, I recognised the two men I had passed on Sunday morning; the third might have been Singleton's brother by the likeness of one to the other.

'It was in there,' said the man in velveteens, in a hoarse whisper, pointing to one of the outhouses, 'me and my pal was a-hiding when the parson came down with the old man on his shoulder and pitched him down alongside the well, and that's the chain he hoisted him up and dropped him in with.'

'The parson,' I whispered to Singleton.
'He says the parson.'

Singleton laughed at my simplicity.

'You don't suppose such an old hand as Shuttle would omit the opportunity of slipping on somebody else's coat if he found one handy. Come on,' he added in a whisper, leading the way across the yard to the shrubbery.

· We come along here, didn't we, Bill?

'Not a word,' murmured Singleton.

We threaded our way slowly along the dripping walk in single file, that the rustle of the laurels might not betray us. I was close to Singleton, the man in velveteen behind me. Presently the latter, pressing forward, reached out his hand and touched Singleton's arm. We halted immediately.

'Just frough there we see him fust,' he whispered, indicating an opening in the shrubbery.

We approached with increased caution,

and stopped where the evergreens permitted us to get an almost uninterrupted view of the front of the house. The library window appeared to be open, though the light was now so dim under the shadow of the veranda that I could not be certain on this point; but, to my great relief, nobody was in sight. All was still—there was not a sound but the tap now and then of a falling drop on the foliage about us. We waited some time in a silence that was more terrible to me than I can describe; then the man beside me touched Singleton's arm again, nodding towards the window, on which all our eyes were strained, and at the same moment I perceived a pale patch in the blackness of the window-the face of someone standing there. I gasped for breath; it seemed as if the silence and stillness were suffocating me—the sensation I have imagined to accompany awaking from premature burial.

I prayed that Yorke-if it was he who

stood there—might withdraw, for the keenest sight could not identify him where he then stood. That was obvious by the silence of the witnesses, and their strained attention. With difficulty one could make out that the patch was a face, and nothing more than that was visible. But just then one of us—certainly not I—shifting his long restrained position, trod on a rotten stick, which snapped with a sharp crack.

The sound reached Yorke's car. He came from the room, advanced a couple of paces on the lawn, and stood there with his hands behind him, looking round as if to see what had caused the noise. To my consternation I perceived that he had again assumed his clerical make-up. Indistinct as his features were at that distance and in the dim twilight, the ashy pallor of his face was yet noticeable. Had the premonition of his approaching fate come to him under the ominous influence of surrounding gloom! I asked myself.

With one last glance round, he turned his back on us and re-entered the house; and as he disappeared Singleton made a sign to us to follow him.

Without a whispered word, noiselessly we followed him back into the courtyard. He unbolted the gate, and we passed out one by one into Love Lane.

'That's him, master,' muttered one of the men, as soon as we were clear of the place; 'it's him we see do the job; ain't it, Bill?'

'I'll take my dying oaf on it,' replied his mate. 'Why, it's jest his very movements as he did that morning when he came out, and kinder took a squinny around to see if it was all right afore he fetched the corpus, his werry face and long coat and everyfing.'

They continued to discuss the matter in a low undertone until we separated at the corner of Love Lane, the witnesses, with the man who resembled Singleton, going in the

direction of the church, while Singleton and I returned to The Cedars. I had not a word to say. In the path leading to the house we met Jack.

- · Have you succeeded?' he asked.
- 'Down to the ground, sir,' responded Singleton gleefully. 'Couldn't have turned out better. Our two witnesses agree in swearing to Shuttle's identity. There's not the shadow of a difference in their testimony.'
 - 'What is the next step?' asked Jack.
- 'First of all I must see the Admiral, and then we get our warrant and a couple of policemen to arrest him.'
 - 'You will not be able to do that to-night.'
- 'No, sir; but to-morrow, first thing, we shall clap the bracelets on Mr. Shuttle.'
- 'The Admiral is in the house,' Jack said; and turning me about, 'Do you mind fetching the trap, Dick? I told the lad to take it to the Stag.' Then he added, as Singleton left us, 'I'll have Kitty ready by

the time you return, and make all the necessary excuses for leaving abruptly.'

'Thank you, Jack. You are a good fellow,' said I gratefully, for I knew he had arranged this sudden departure on my account, seeing how terribly upset I was. 'I shall be all right when I've had a stiff glass of hot brandy and a pipe.'

I fancy I must have taken more than one stiff glass of brandy at the Stag, for I have only the vaguest recollection of what followed. I remember that, soon after leaving The Cedars, Jack pulled up for little Jemmy to jump down and fetch my hat, which, for some unaccountable reason, had dropped off; that subsequently the good and attentive little lad held on to my arm with both hands, as if he expected me to drop off in the same erratic manner, and that for the rest of the journey I was troubled with a dreadful bad hiccough, which shook my whole frame every now and then, and which so tickled

little Jimmy's sense of humour that, unable to contain himself, his merriment exploded more than once in an ill-concealed splutter.

The long drive, however, did me good, and after a wash I came down to supper quite myself, but feeling that some excuse was necessary for my silence during the journey (I could not recall a single word that I had spoken to Jack and Kitty on the way home). I said I feared that the exciting incident in which I had been called upon to take a part had upset me somewhat.

'I think it has upset us all more or less,' replied Jack, with a glance at Kitty, who looked unusually pale and careworn; 'and as we have talked of nothing else all the evening, we had better perhaps agree to say no more on the subject to-night.'

I seconded this proposal heartily, and did my best to support a general conversation. Kitty, too, tried to throw off the burden which evidently weighed upon her mind, and be bright and cheerful; but the effort was too great to be sustained, and very soon after supper she confessed to fatigue, and bade us good-night.

'Would you like to turn in, Dick?' Jack asked, returning to the room after a final 'Good-night' to Kitty at the foot of the stairs.

'I couldn't go to sleep if I did,' said I.
'No; I would rather sit up. I'm all right now.'

'Then we will smoke a pipe in the garden, and have a talk. The stars are out, and it's close indoors.'

When we had lit up and were strolling along the moist path he spoke again.

'Kitty suspects the worst,' said he; 'but she stands out bravely, and hopes on still from sheer loyalty to her father. One dreads to destroy the last illusion of the poor little soul, and yet I am afraid the truth must come out.'

'At the trial?'

'Oh, before that! It must not come to a trial. We must get him away.'

But, if he is to be arrested to-morrow morning, how's that to be done? I asked.

'Bring him here to-night,' he replied in the decided tone of a man who has thought out his problem and found the solution.

'To-night!' I exclaimed in astonishment.

'Yes. If we leave here about twelve or one o'clock, we are not likely to be seen; in this place he is less open to discovery than anywhere else. The difficulty is about Kitty. Conceal him how we may, she must find out that he is in the house before long, and then I don't know how her illusion is to be sustained.'

I suggested that I should take her to London under the pretext of buying a trousseau.

- 'That may be advisable. However, we can settle that when we have brought her father here safely. Will you come with me, Dick?'
- 'Of course I will,' said I. 'Shall we walk it?'
- 'No, there's no greater danger in driving; and if it comes to flight, the mare's pace may tell. We'll get the trap out ready. Luckily, Kitty's room is on the other side, and the rush of the stream will cover the little noise we make in walking the mare out into the road.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

YORKE TAKES FLIGHT AT LAST.

We did not meet a soul on the road between the mill and St. Botolph's. The night was pitch-dark, for only now and then a star pierced the clouds that obscured the moonless sky.

'How do you propose to get at him?' I asked; 'the bell-wire is cut.'

'If it were not, I should not ring the bell. There must be no noise. We must take him quickly by storm, either going through Strong's grounds if his gate is unlocked, or else over the wall. The trap can

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be left down the lane. We must be near it now. Can you make out the turning?'

As he spoke he drew in the mare to a walking pace, and we both peered into the darkness. Presently we descried the opening, and, still at a walking pace, we turned down Love Lane, and stopped as we made out the silhouette of the outbuildings.

My courage failed me considerably at the thought of invading Yorke's stronghold at this hour, when, taking us for an enemy, he might put a stop to our proceedings with a pistol-shot; nevertheless, when Jack proposed that I should stay with the trap I declined the offer, and said I should prefer to accompany him, which, indeed, was no more than the truth, for the possibility of being assailed in the dark by Roberts was even more unpleasant than the prospect of facing danger in the company of Jack.

'All right,' said he, as he got down, and, feeling about on his right, he added, 'I can

hitch the rein over these pailings; the mare will stand quiet till we return.'

I stepped down, and, finding myself just opposite the gate, it occurred to me that, as we had left it unfastened in quitting the Vicarage, it would still be open, unless Yorke or Roberts had discovered the fact later on.

I felt about for the latch, and, raising it, found to my great satisfaction that the gate was unbolted. I did not like the notion of scaling a wall in the dark.

'We may as well light one of the lamps and take it with us to see the way,' said Jack, when he found that we could enter by the yard.

'Yes,' said I, 'it will look less as if we were trying to capture them;' and, that Yorke might not make any mistake on that head, I kept calling in a low, kind tone of voice as we advanced towards the house, 'Bob Yorke, Bob, Bob, old chap,' and such-like phrases.

Not a light was visible in any of the windows when we reached the house, and we heard no sound within after trying the doors in the front and at the back, and tapping at them.

'They do not or will not hear us,' said Jack, after rapping for the third time at the front door. 'However, we must get in somehow,' going to the library window and examining it by the light of his lamp.

· Bob Yorke!' I called through the keyhole as loudly as I dared; 'Bob, old chap!'

'That will do,' said Jack; 'we don't want everyone to know his name.' At the same moment I heard a grating scratch, and, glancing at Jack, perceived that he was cutting a pane of glass with the diamond in his finger-ring. Presently he gave the pane a smart blow with his elbow, and it fell inward on the carpeted floor without noise.

Yorke himself could not have done the job more neatly. Through the opening Jack put

his arm, undid the fastening, and then opened the window. He marched into the library (and I followed, though with a less audacious step), and, throwing the light before him, entered the hall and explored the other rooms on the ground-floor.

'It looks as if the birds are flown,' said he cheerfully, as he ran up the stairs. And there could be no doubt that this was the case when, having searched all the other rooms, we entered that which Yorke had obviously occupied. On the toilette-table, before the glass, was the ordinary travelling dressing-case used by actors, open, with all its fittings of rouge-pots, gum-pots, false-hair packets, brushes, hare's feet, etc., displayed. And on the bed lay the clerical dress he had worn when I saw him last.

'That shows that he has changed his disguise, at any rate,' said I, pointing to the things.

Jack picked up the long black coat and

looked at it in perplexity; then, turning to me, he said:

'This looks like the curate's coat—do I understand you that Yorke wore this when the witnesses identified him?'

'Yes. Yorke had made up exactly like Mr. Shepherd. He's perfectly mad about making up—it was his vanity when he was an actor.'

'There's method in his madness. Yorke is no fool. We may be sure he had some purpose in disguising himself.'

'But what end was it to serve?'

'That is what I am trying to make out. By George!' he added, after a pause, 'it might have been that. He knew the detectives were after him.'

'I warned him from the first.'

'He also mixed with the roughs at Chester, and stood as fair a chance as Singleton of hearing it rumoured that a couple of sharpers had beasted of being able to hang the murderer'

'I saw him with a gang of sharpers at Scarborough,' said I.

'Then that's it, you may depend upon it. He's as shrewd as Singleton, and I'll be bound he and Roberts have watched the detective's movements quite as closely as Singleton has watched his. Singleton himself suspected that the witnesses had tried to get money out of Yorke before offering their evidence to him.'

'I saw them hanging about the Vicarage on Sunday morning, and pointed them out to Yorke, who saw them also.'

'That's it!' cried Jack, with increased excitement; 'having refused their offer, Yorke might know well enough what would follow. Not a soul came near the place, you may be sure, unknown to Yorke and Roberts. Without doubt they knew of the witnesses being brought yesterday afternoon to The Cedars, and understood that the object in bringing them was to identify him. That explains

the strange coincidence of his showing himself on the lawn at the very moment Singleton had you and the rest in the shrubbery. Roberts may have given him the signal.'

'A stick snapped,' said I.

'There's corroboration on every point. It's as clear as day.'

'I don't see it,' said I, quite bewildered.

'I have heard that he has shaved off his chin tuft. Did you ever see him in this makeup while Shepherd was with him?'

'No.'

'Just so. He adopted the dress when he discovered the curate's treachery as a means of retaliation and of circumventing Singleton at the same time. Hang it! one cannot help admiring his ingenuity. It will be impossible to get a jury to convict on the evidence of those witnesses.'

'Do you think so, Jack?' I asked hopefully.

'I am certain of it. There could not have

been light enough to distinguish his features clearly.'

- They were indistinct. It was the general appearance that resembled the curate's.'
- 'Where will the resemblance be when Yorke appears in the witness-box in his natural character?'
 - 'They are unlike enough, to be sure.'
- to anything for the sake of gain; but they will hesitate under examination to assert that Yorke is the man they saw last night, with Shepherd himself in court to shake any belief they may entertain. If you were in the box, and I called upon you to swear whether the man you saw in company with those witnesses resembled Yorke more than the curate, you, in spite of your knowledge to the contrary, would have to admit—what?
- 'Certainly that he most resembled the curate.'
 - · Then your evidence alone would save

Yorke. However, we will not leave his fate to the decision of a jury, if we can help it,' he added.

'Thank Heaven!' I murmured, trembling at the bare possibility of having to go into a witness-box.

Jack gave me the lamp to hold, and wrote on a page in his notebook these words:

'If you need a refuge or money, come at any hour to the future husband of your daughter.'

'There,' said he, tearing out the leaf and setting it up in the open dressing-case. 'No matter who sees that, it will not compromise Yorke or Kitty either.'

As we could do nothing more, we returned by the way we had come, closed the gate in Love Lane, and took our scats in the trap.

'I think, Dick, you had better tell me all you know about Yorke,' said Jack, as soon as we had started. 'There is no longer any necessity for silence on your part, and we shall be less likely to take a false step if we have a clear knowledge of the ground we are treading.'

'Nothing will give me greater pleasure,' I replied; 'for I detest keeping anything to myself, and particularly to concealing it from a good friend like you;' and thereupon I told all I knew about Yorke from the very beginning to the end, and a wonderful relief it was to get this off my mind, and speak without reserve at last upon a subject which I had scarcely dared to refer to, for fear of betraying something that ought to be kept in the dark.

'It's odd,' said Jack, in a reflective tone, when my story was told. 'Yorke's behaviour is so inconsistent with the character of a thorough-paced rascal that I cannot believe him guilty of active participation in this crime. Be that as it may, we must not allow Singleton to hunt him down. I'll find

him to-morrow morning before he can get the warrant and buy him off, if he's to be bought.'

I was awoke the next morning by the sharp crack of a pebble striking the windowpane; another before I well knew where I was, and then, jumping out of bed with my heart in my mouth, I ran to the window, expecting to see Yorke there. But it was only Jack standing below with his arm round Kitty's waist. They laughed at the terrified expression of my face, and, telling me they were getting hungry, Jack asked me if I would be kind enough to come down at my earliest convenience. I promised to be down in five minutes, and that which incited me to greater haste was the whiff of toasting bacon that came up from the kitchen. It would have been a sin to 'put back' anything that Mrs. Bailey cooked.

The morning was fresh and bright, a brisk

breeze having sprung up, and it gladdened my heart to think that we had such a friend as Jack. I knew that if Yorke was to be saved Jack would save him, and I saw by my Kitty's face that he had found means to chase away much of the terrible anxiety caused by her latent suspicion. A strong and good man can inspire so much confidence and hope. It is a blessing to have the friendship of such a man.

How delightful the breakfast-room looked when I came down! Mrs. Bailey had lit a fire on the hearth, thinking it would look comfortable and dry the air after the rain—thoughtful soul! Kitty was setting fresh flowers in the vases with Jack's assistance, and the appearance of the snowy tablecloth and the good things on it would have perverted the austerity of an anchorite.

'Lord!' thought I, 'if anything should happen now to send us back into dingy, stuffy lodgings, with their worn furniture and yellow linen, and their pervading reek of Yarmouth bloaters!'

'Catch us a dish of trout for lunch, Dick,' said Jack, as he handed me a plate of eggs and bacon, the thin rashers nicely curled and not burnt. 'Kitty and I are going over to Chester. We have business there. Kitty's shopping is not all over yet, and I must see Feverell. Besides that, we are both curious to know how Mr. Shuttle fares.'

'I've had enough of that affair,' said I with a laugh; 'a morning's fishing will suit me better.'

The cheerful tone of indifference with which I was enabled to say this, through knowing that Yorke was no longer at the Vicarage, was not without effect on Kitty. She was regarding me at the time, and she must have said to herself, 'If that was my father, he would not be so careless,' and after that there was a marked difference in her

gaiety—it was natural, spontaneous, and not assumed.

This was a good beginning, and I took it as an omen of better things that I caught that morning more trout than ever I had taken before in all my life. Mrs. Bailey was enraptured with them when I took my spoil into the kitchen, and I was so elated that I—well, I'm not ashamed to confess it—I took that comely soul by the waist and gave her a kiss.

'Oh, Mr. Holderness!' she exclaimed, 'and there's the trap just coming into the yard! Why, Mr. Sherridan may have seen you.'

'And I don't mind if he has,' said I stoutly; nevertheless, I left the kitchen before Jack had the chance of seeing more.

'Shuttle has bolted,' said Jack to me, as he lifted Kitty from the trap.

'Has he, though!' said I, feigning surprise.
'Well, I'm not sorry, for he's never been anything but civil to me.'

Here again the lack of astonishment and interest in my face, not escaping Kitty's observation, doubtless did much to dispel her fears. She left us, and ran up to her room humming a tune.

'That's a good sign,' said Jack, as he caught the sound. 'You've seen no one?' he asked, as we strolled off toward the orchard.

'No; what news have you picked up?'

'None that we were not prepared to hear. I found Singleton. Pointed out the hopelessness of trying to convict Shuttle on the evidence of his witnesses. He evidently had come to the same conclusion, seeing how the tables had been turned by Shuttle's disguise. I told him I abandoned the case, and should advise Strong to withdraw. "Sir," says he, "my credit's more to me than your support or Admiral Strong's, and I shall go on with this case to the very last."

'Well, let him try,' said I, in a tone of confidence.

- 'M—yes,' Jack replied dubiously; 'he'll try, whether we let him or not. We cannot afford to be too careless, Dick.'
 - 'Why, what can he do?'
- 'Well, I'm afraid he intends to get the curate out of the way. Happily he doesn't know where to find him, despite his assertion. That is evident from the fact that he has been to Strong this morning asking for information. But the letter Strong received had no address, and the answer was to be sent to a post-office. You see, if he does spirit Shepherd away, our defence is terribly weakened, for we cannot shake the evidence of the witnesses by confronting them with the curate and making them doubt their own senses.
 - 'Then, what are we to do, Jack?'
 - 'Find the curate,' he replied decisively.

CHAPTER XLV.

I FIND MR. SHEPHERD AGAIN.

'FIND the curate'—that was easier said than done.

We knew he was in London by the postal address he had sent to the Admiral; that was our only clue to his whereabouts, and this clue was also in the possession of Singleton, who, doubtless, was already following it up. It was ridiculous to think of beating him at work of this kind, and the attempt might lead him to suspect the very thing it was most important to conceal, namely, our connection and sympathy with Yorke. Jack wrote a long letter to his

solicitor, Mr. Cunningham, to whom he had already telegraphed—but more than this nothing could be done.

We relied now on Yorke putting himself beyond the reach of Singleton and the police, and as a couple of days passed without our hearing a word about him or Singleton our confidence increased. Our pleasant surroundings, the delightful home life at the mill, Kitty's occupation in adorning the house, Jack's cheerful society, and the general sense of peace and happiness that prevailed, all helped to lull us into tranquillity. But, as a man can never be quite content for long, an uncanny feeling began to creep over me that it was about time I found something to do. I had no intention of making myself a pensioner on Jack, and the amount of my savings did not permit me to think, except with despondency, of retiring from my profession; and so I was not displeased to receive by the first post on Saturday

morning a letter which held out a prospect of re-engagement. I say a prospect, for there was no definite offer made, the letter running thus:

'21, West Street, Crewe.

'SIR,

'If you can make it convenient to call upon me to-morrow (Saturday) afternoon or evening (not later than nine o'clock), we may possibly be able to transact a little matter of business greatly to your advantage.

'Yours most truly,

'EDWIN GOODMAN.'

'Do you know Mr. Goodman?' Jack asked, when I showed him the letter.

'Never to my knowledge heard his name before.'

'He is not accustomed to writing business letters, I should say, by his hand and queer style; and it's odd that he should know your address, being a stranger to you—odd, too,' he added, pulling his moustache, 'that he is so vague about the nature of the business—there's very little music going on in Crewe, I imagine. Shall you reply?'

'Yes, Jack; I shall run over there in the afternoon. I can't afford to let the chance of an engagement slip through my fingers. As to the oddity of the letter, that's nothing; men in our profession are odd. I've been out of work some time, and I'm getting a little anxious.'

'As you please, old fellow. But, of course, you cannot leave us before we are married.'

I reached Crewe between four and five in the afternoon, and in West Street found that No. 21 was nothing but a coffee tavern of the usual cheap and cheerless description. A dirty girl was rubbing up a great copper urn on the counter, and when I asked for Mr. Goodman she called up the echoing

stairs, 'Mr. Goodman, you're wanted,' and went on with her cleaning, without bestowing a single word or a second glance on me.

As Mr. Goodman was some time in replying to the call, I seated myself in one of the boxes, and took up a dirty journal to beguile the time, saying that I had certainly done a foolish thing to come so far without better security of being repaid for my trouble. At length there was a step on the stairs, and then I caught sight of a young man whom, for a moment, I failed to recognise; but as he came towards me his mincing gait, the smile on his face, and his manner of carrying his hands before him like a seal's flappers, left no doubt as to his identity. It was Mr. Shepherd, but so changed that a casual observer, unacquainted with his characteristic mannerisms, would certainly not have known him for the curate of St. Botolph's. He wore a light tourist suit, a green tie, and a brown billycock hat; but that which most disguised him was a scraggy beard and moustache. At our previous meeting I had noticed a kind of fluffiness upon his cheek and lip, but as its colour was identical with his sandy complexion it was scarcely noticeable. Since then it had grown considerably, and changed its colour to a purplish black, which I attribute to the use of a dye.

'So sorry to keep you waiting, my deah Mr. Holderness,' said he. 'I was just putting on this gay new suit of clothes. How do you think I look in them?'

'I should not have known you,' said I.

This information seemed to give him great satisfaction, for he put several questions to elicit further assurance of the fact before coming to the point which concerned me more.

'Thank you so much for coming to see me. It is so kind of you,' said he at length.

'I came to see Mr. Goodman on a matter of business.'

'I am Mr. Goodman,' said he, tapping his waistcoat with a furtive glance towards the girl at the counter. 'But you must come up into my little room to hear all I have to tell you.'

I followed him up the bare stairs to a comfortless little room on the first floor, and there, having fastened the door, he gave me one chair and took the other with a gleeful smile.

'And so Mr. Sherridan is going to marry Miss Kitty, after all,' he began.

'Yes,' I replied; 'but I should be glad to know how you learned the fact.' It struck me that he had brought me from Chester for the purpose of pumping me, and I resolved that I would get as much out of him as I could for my railway fare.

'Ah, you must not think,' said he, shaking his finger at me waggishly, 'that all my kind Christian friends at St. Botolph's have forgotten me. Oh, no, no, no, no, no! There is a dear young person in the Sunday-school, whom you will hear about one of these days, perhaps, for we correspond very regularly, and I hear all that is going on. I have heard that the notice is put up at the registry office, and that you drive over to Chester very often, and that Mr. Sherridan is spending a great deal of money at Mr. Rotherham's, the upholsterer. I am afraid he is just as reckless and extravagant as evah, and that he takes no more care of his money now than when he had a large fortune at his command.'

'Not a bit,' said I, putting on a look of vexation which I was far from feeling, thinking that I must sustain the part I had previously played. 'He is just the same as ever. He would throw away his last sovereign as freely as if he had thousands in the bank.'

'And I find that his comedy is no longer being played in London.'

- 'True, there's nothing coming in and everything going out.'
- 'But what a dreadful prospect that is for deah Miss Kitty! What will become of them when all is spent, and no credit is to be obtained? Of course you would do your utmost to keep them and the little family which is sure to come from starvation; but I dare say you have not more money than you know what to do with.'
- 'That's a truth. I'm out of work. And it was anxiety on that account that brought me over here.'
- 'No more money than you know what to do with,' he repeated in a tone of abstraction, taking no notice of my reply. 'Would you think me very rude, my deah Mr. Holderness, if I asked you how much money you have?'

I did think the question decidedly rude, but, being thrown off my guard by surprise, I replied with little hesitation that my savings amounted to about six hundred pounds.

- 'Six hundred pounds, that is very little,' said he with a rueful shake of the head. 'Very little indeed. The fact is, I thought of proposing a little business speculation which would provide against that rainy day which I foresee must damp Miss Kitty's future—a perfectly safe little investment; but I'm afraid six hundred pounds will not be sufficient to meet my requirements. Now, if you could make it ten hundred——'
- · I don't see how I'm to do that,' said I, wondering what on earth the investment could be.
- 'Have you no kind Christian friends who would lend you four hundred?'
- 'Well, I've a brother in the same line as yourself, but I don't think he would part without good security and a large interest.'
- 'I suppose Mr. Sherridan could not raise the money if he would?'
- 'He might,' said I, with a tone of calculation, wishing to discover what the curate was

driving at. 'The mill-house is his property; he bought it before the will was produced, and has given Admiral Strong to know that he does not intend to refund the money.'

'What a witty young man!' exclaimed Shepherd, holding up his hands in admiration. 'Well, he could certainly get a mortgage on the property to oblige you.'

'Yes; but before I asked him to do me the favour, I should want to know what this investment is which you suggest.'

Mr. Shepherd rose from his seat, and, crossing the room on tiptoe, put his ear to the door, and listened attentively for two or three seconds; then, coming back, he seated himself again, and in a low voice said:

'Now, my deah Mr. Holderness, I am about to repose great confidence in you, because I know full well what a good man you are; and I am going to impart a secret of very great importance. Let me tell you that my faith in human nature has been rudely,

very rudely, shaken, and that I have found those whom I have trusted very false, and very faithless, and very wicked indeed.'

'Why, who can they be, Mr. Shepherd?'

'Well, first of all,' said he, ticking off his thumb with his forefinger and drawing a long upper lip, 'there is little missy at The Cedars.'

'What! Miss Helen Strong?' said I, in a tone of amazement.

'Yes; she is a wicked, deceitful little pussy.' I may mention here, though I think I have said so elsewhere, that Miss Strong was what in a lower class of society would be called a strapping young woman, who at the scale would have made Mr. Shepherd kick the beam; but it was the peculiarity of this young man to regard most of his fellow-creatures as babes and sucklings. 'A naughty little sly-boots,' he continued, 'for she led me to believe that, if I procured the will, she would be my wee wifey; but as soon as her

deceitful end is gained, she takes no further notice of me, and is not polite enough to answer even one of the many letters I have written to her. That is not pretty behaviour, you know. And I'm told that Captain Dysart has come back, and that he accompanied her to the singing-class on Thursday; so it is very clear that their engagement is renewed now that she is in a better position. All that is very unpleasant to me; but,' he added, shaking his finger, while his smile formed a vindictive line about his mouth-'but I shall be even with little missy yet. I was never quite sure that she intended to behave uprightly in this little affair, but she will be very sorry—very sorry indeed—that she did not behave uprightly when she finds that she has fallen into her own trap. And then,' ticking off the next finger, 'there's that shocking old gentleman, Admiral Strong, with his strong and ungovernable temper, and his violent ways, and his wicked speech

-he's a wicked old tyrant, and a very lawless reprobate, and most ungrateful. I bought up many bills which would have brought him to grief long ago, had I not bought them; and when I ask him to discharge his obligations, he makes no reply to my request, and when I press for payment, and signify that it will be to his advantage to do so promptly, as I have it in my power to make him particularly uncomfortable if he does not pay me, he responds in a letter, which came this morning, saying that if I like to call upon him at any time he will certainly pay me according to my deserts, and give me "piper's pay," whatever that may mean.'

'More kicks than halfpence,' I explained.

'Thank you so much—more kicks than halfpennies—that is the construction I put upon the term; but I dare say he will be very sorry that he did not pay me the halfpennies—very sorry indeed. And then,'

coming to the third finger, 'there is Mr. Singleton, who deceived me most shamefully, for, after promising me five hundred pounds for the will, he actually gave me a cheque which was worth nothing at all—a cheque which was dishonoured at the bank, a cheque which he had the barefaced assurance to tell me would not be met until it was proved by the conviction of Mr. Shuttle that the will had been in his possession. But I can see through his artifice; I know very well what he wants. He expects by the offer of a large reward to tempt some unprincipled person or persons to come forward and declare they saw what took place at the Vicarage on the night when my deah old friend and master was murdered, and, to support the evidence of those false witnesses, he will need my testimony with regard to my finding the will in Mr. Shuttle's trunk. Without that testimony he will not dare to bring the case into court. But I do not

intend to give my testimony, because, on the one hand, I have no desire to be cross-examined by a counsel, and to be held up to ridicule and scorn as unfortunate witnesses too frequently are held up; and, on the other hand, I have conscientious scruples against hunting down an erring brother to his doom; for what would it profit me to bring Mr. Shuttle to the gallows! He has done me no harm, and I bear him no ill-will. I shall not raise my hand against him if I can avoid doing so.'

'But in the other case—' I suggested.

'Oh! that would be a very different matter. Mr. Singleton has shown himself to be a very unscrupulous and unfeeling man. If he found he could not get a conviction against Mr. Shuttle, it might suit his purpose to make someone bear false witness against me. He might go so far as to induce Mr. Shuttle to bear false witness against me, and that would be very awkward, as the will was undoubtedly

given up by me. Mercy carried to excess is folly, and certainly to save myself I should do all in my power to convict Mr. Shuttle. But as I told you just now, my deah Mr. Holderness, I do not intend to give evidence in this case and aid Mr. Singleton for nothing. On the contrary, I hope to frustrate him not less than those others who have so cruelly deceived me.'

'And how will you do that?' I asked.

'I propose to leave Crewe to-night, and to-morrow morning I shall leave London, and to-morrow evening I shall be in Paris. I am going on a Continental tour—hence this gay attire.'

'That will upset Mr. Singleton's arrangements, to be sure,' said I cheerfully; 'but I fail to see how Miss Strong and the Admiral are to suffer by it.'

Mr. Shepherd made me a blithesome sign to wait a minute, and, going again to the door on tiptoe, opened it sharply and looked into the passage outside. Finding no eavesdropper there, he returned with a light and springy step, and, seating himself, said:

'I am coming now to the most interesting part of this pleasant little discussion.'

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CURATE MAKES A CURIOUS PROPOSAL.

After gaining time to collect his thoughts, or overcome some semblance of modesty by wiping the moisture from his face and hands with a handkerchief, the curate continued:

'I must tell you, my deah Mr. Holderness, that when my esteemed friend and master the Vicah heard my report of his grandson's connection with the stage, and saw, moreover, by those naughty bills on the walls that he intended to produce 'The Blue-stocking' at Chester, he was so exasperated that he destroyed the will he had made, and wrote another, bequeathing his whole fortune to

Admiral Strong; and this will he sent immediately to his solicitor in London, Mr. Cunningham. Now, this will Mr. Cunningham sent back to the Vicah with a letter, in which he said that he considered his action premature, and advised him to wait until he had some more convincing proof of his grandson's profligacy before disinheriting I will not conceal the fact that he added some observations with regard to me by no means flattering, and tending to shake the deah old Vicah's faith in my disinterested testimony. The Vicah was terribly discomposed by this letter, and for two or three days he was not himself at all-very harsh and unkind to me, very sad and depressed, as he walked about the garden, and quite overcome with sentimental emotion on finding in his desk the first letter Mr. Sherridan had written him-a very ill-written and badly-composed boyish effusion. And that night he wrote another will, word for word

alike to the will he had destroyed, a will dividing his estate in equal parts between Admiral Strong and Mr. Sherridan. And so at that time there were two wills, the last dated June 11, the other a week or so earlier; and these two wills he placed together in the sandal-wood box wherein he was wont to keep his valuable papers. Now, in keeping both wills, it is obvious that he had some wavering doubt as to the advisability of yielding to the influence of sentiment, and, recollecting Mr. Cunningham's advice, resolved in his mind to be guided by the further development of his grandson's character as to which will should be destroyed and which preserved. And that resolution may have come to him at the very last moment, while he was yet in doubt whether Mr. Sherridan's play would turn out to be a profligate and indecent production, or a decorous and praiseworthy work of dramatic art. That, I take it, was this good man's state of mind on the night of the 11th. But, as you know, he did not live to decide the question, which was, as it were, in the balance.'

'Both wills were in existence at the time of his death.' said I, beginning to see his drift.

'Both,' said he, raising his eyebrows and smiling his sweetest; 'and I obtained both from Mr. Shuttle's trunk. The one I produced is worth no more than the cheque Mr. Singleton gave me for it. So you see how very foolish, as well as very wicked, it is to deceive, and how terribly deah that little missy will have to pay for her folly, and how very short-lived will be the triumph of her rude papa.'

'And the other will?'

'That is worth at least fifteen thousand pounds, and I offer to let you have it for ten hundred. With that will in your possession you can stipulate upon a certain sum

being settled on Miss Kitty as a wedding portion, and so secure her nicely against the terrible result of her husband's extravagance. Fifteen thousand pounds is a great deal of money, but you can make it more still, if you choose.'

'Naturally I should like to know all the advantages to be got by the investment,' said I, subduing the inclination I felt to express my disgust for this canting scoundrel, in order to get at the full extent of his rascality.

'Well, my deah Mr. Holderness, you have only to obliterate that part of the will which shows how the estate is to be divided; the date and signature alone will prove the previous will invalid, and then the whole estate will revert once more to Mr. Sherridan.'

This took my breath away for the moment; but again, by an effort, I assumed an air of complacency, as I told him that the transac-

tion was of too serious a nature to be decided on hastily.

'Besides,' I added. 'I have but six hundred pounds all told, and I must find some pretext for getting Mr. Sherridan to raise me the rest on a mortgage, as I am firmly convinced that he would not be a party to the transaction if he knew it.'

'That is what I thought. He is so eccentric and original, and that is why I preferred to offer it to you rather than to him or Admiral Strong. There is no hurry, you know. As soon as I get to Paris I will send you my address, and when you bring me the money you shall have the will, and we can spend a very merry little evening or two together in that gay capital.'

Jack and Kitty were at the station to meet me, I having promised to return by the 6.30 train if possible. They had been shopping, and the trap was loaded with parcels - groceries, drapery, household requisites, papers, magazines, and books, and both were as cheerful and light-hearted as larks in a spring sky. 'If Mr. Shepherd could only see them now with their purchases,' thought I, 'his estimation of Jack's improvidence and reckless extravagance would be more appalling than ever.' But this spectacle created a different and more pleasing impression in my mind, for I knew that Jack, who cared as little for luxuries as any young man in the world, was indulging Kitty's taste in this direction with the sole object of giving her pleasure and diverting her thoughts from the graver subject which lay so close at hand.

I had made up a story to deceive Kitty, and I told them that the business Mr. Goodman wished to discuss was the formation of an instrumental music society for the men employed in the railway works. 'But,' said I, 'I don't think anything will come of it;

my terms seemed to frighten the old gentleman, and I doubt if he will trouble himself again to write me on the matter.'

Happily the mare was very fresh, and Kitty was so fully occupied in keeping her in hand that I got through my string of lies without much embarrassing questioning on her part. But Jack, who turned round and kept his eyes on my face all the while, saw well enough that my story was nothing but a tissue of falsehoods. I knew that by the humorous twinkle in his eye when to bolster up one feeble lie I had to invent another.

'Well, Dick,' he said, when Kitty had left us for the night, and we had drawn up our armchairs before the embers on the hearth to enjoy a sociable pipe and a glass of grog, 'who is this mysterious Mr. Goodman!'

I nodded assent.

^{&#}x27;Shepherd,' said I in a whisper.

^{&#}x27;The devil!'

'Singleton has not got him out of the country yet, then?'

'No, and there is no necessity, for he has so altered his appearance that no one who saw Yorke as those witnesses saw him the other night would recognise any likeness between him and the curate. What we have to fear now is that Singleton will prevent Shepherd leaving the country.'

I then described Shepherd's appearance, and narrated all that had passed between us. Jack listened in grave silence, scarcely saying a word till I had finished.

'You are right, Dick,' he said then; 'this changes the aspect of affairs entirely. It is as much to our interest now to keep the rascal out of the witness-box as it was before to get him into it.'

'Well, thank Heaven! he goes to Paris to-morrow.'

Jack shook his head doubtfully.

'Will he go?—that's the question. I do

not doubt that he intends to go; but between this and the starting of the boat to-morrow something may happen to change his mind. We must not underrate Singleton's ability. It is scarcely likely that he would lose sight of Shepherd; I imagine he has kept as sharp an eye on his movements as on Yorke's, and you may depend upon it he will find some means of detaining him if there is the least chance of apprehending Yorke. What we have to pray for is that Yorke may be now beyond his reach.'

We discussed the possibilities and probabilities of escape until there seemed nothing more to be said on the subject, and then Jack, to give a turn to our ideas, rose and suggested that we should go out and see what kind of a night it was.

It was still and starry, with a freshness in the air which was pleasant to feel after sitting so long over the fire. We walked down the garden and back again, stopping by the parapet to look down at the mill-stream, and then up at the countless stars above.

As we strolled slowly away towards the house, Jack said in his calm, collected tone:

'There's a man on the other side of the stream—did you see him, Dick?'

'A man!' said I, with a start; 'what the deuce can he be doing there at this time of night?'

'That's what I can't make out; I only saw that it was a man. Perhaps it's some poor devil after the trout.'

- 'A poacher?'
- 'Yes.'
- 'What shall you do?'
- 'If I were sure it was only a poacher, I should leave him alone, but—perhaps—it's Yorke.'
- 'Why, Moulsey Church is just striking twelve.'
- 'It wouldn't be prudent to show himself out of the Vicarage before ten, on a market

night; it would take a couple of hours to walk over. It may be he.'

'But why should he be hanging about there?'

Doubtful if Kitty is still up, perhaps. Possibly he has some feeling with regard to me. Better go across the bridge and see, old man.' And as I hesitated to accept this proposal, he added: 'If he is a poacher he will take to his heels when he sees you on the bridge.'

Encouraged by this assurance, I put on a bold face, and, leaving Jack at the corner of the house, went into the road and over the bridge.

Straining my eyes down the bank of the stream, I presently descried the figure I was looking for. He did not take to his heels, but came boldly on to meet me. It was Yorke.

CHAPTER XLVII.

YORKE BEATS DICK TURPIN'S RECORD.

From what I could make out by the dim light of the stars, Yorke was dressed now to represent a cyclist. He wore a cap, a close-fitting button-up jacket, knee breeches and stockings, all of a dark material.

'What's the meaning of this?' I asked angrily. 'Why are you hanging about here when you ought to be hundreds of miles away? Do you know that Singleton has a warrant for your arrest, and that he has found witnesses whose evidence can hang you?'

'I know, I know,' he said, impa-

tiently interrupting me; but, not to be silenced, I continued:

- 'More shame for you, if you know that, to be here now! Have you no pity or consideration for Kitty?'
 - 'Does she know all?' he asked.
- 'No; but she fears more than we dare tell her, and if she had as little affection for you as you have for her, she would long ago have abandoned all hope.'
- 'Sherridan knows everything—that note on my dressing-case was written by him?'
- 'Yes. It was he who saw you prowling along the side of the stream, and he sent me to see who it was.'
- 'And he would marry Kitty though he believes me to be guilty?'
- 'His chief anxiety is to make her his wife before you are found out. For he knows as well as I that Kitty will never marry him if you are convicted of your crimes—much as she loves him. It's true enough that the

sins of the father are visited upon the children—God only knows the bitter humiliation and unhappiness poor Kitty has hidden from us already.'

'Ah, well, she shall not suffer much longer,' said he in a tone of desperate determination, as he rose from the coping-stone of the bridge, on which he had seated himself. 'It must end one way or the other before long.'

It flashed upon me then that Yorke had made up his mind to save himself from the final disgrace by putting an end to his life when the last loophole of escape was closed. The fear of such an end overcame the feeling of indignation that exasperated me; I could think of nothing but the bygone days when Yorke was a lovable companion and a dear friend.

'Come, Bob,' said I, in a more amiable tone, 'there is, surely, some other way out of the difficulty. I can't abide to think of your taking such an awful measure as that. It's bad enough to think of a sick friend leaving you for ever; but for a man in the prime of life and in the possession of all his faculties to meditate suicide! Come in and talk to Jack. He's the most clear-headed man I ever knew. He will advise you. Or, if you won't take advice, at any rate you can stay in safety under his roof.'

'It hasn't come to that yet awhile,' said he, with a short, hard, contemptuous laugh, as he seated himself again on the stone. 'When I do run like a rat into a hole for refuge, you may be sure the end is pretty near.'

'Then, why on earth are you hanging about here?' I repeated.

'You were at supper when I looked in through the window. Kitty's light has not been out more than five minutes. That's her room up there. I saw her shadow on the blind. Now you know why I've been hanging about.'

'But if you do not intend to take refuge here, why have you come? You're not an absolute idiot.'

'I came, Dick,' said he, swinging his feet carelessly, 'on the off chance that you might be able to tell me something I don't know.'

'Ah, I understand. You want to know where Singleton is.'

No. I know exactly where Singleton is at the present moment. What I cannot discover is the whereabouts of Mr. Crawley Shepherd, and there was just a possibility that you might have heard.'

'Why,' said I, breaking in on his meandering explanation, 'I was with him this afternoon.'

'Where?' he asked, springing to his feet in an instant.

'At Crewe.'

'Is he there now?'

'I can't tell. All I know is that he leaves

Victoria to-morrow morning at eleven for Paris.

- 'Not if I can help it,' said he fiercely.
- 'If you have got a grain of prudence you'll let him go,' said I.
- · Why? Come on, he added, quitting the bridge and striding towards the road; 'we can talk and walk at the same time, and there's not a moment to lose. Why am I to let him go?'

Trotting along by his side to keep pace with him, I replied:

· Because he has so changed his appearance that witnesses would find no resemblance whatever between him and the curate you made yourself up to represent. You made a fatal mistake, Bob, in overlooking the fact that Shepherd could take a lesson from your book and disguise himself. The best thing that can happen is that he should get out of the way before Singleton can lay hands on himthat's Jack's opinion.'

'Never mind about Jack and his opinion. Stick to facts, and cut the rest. Answer me straight—how did you come to meet Shepherd?'

I answered the question and a dozen others which Yorke put in quick succession.

'One comfort,' said I, when I had put him in possession of the main facts, 'to-morrow is Sunday.'

'That will make no difference to Singleton. If he can stop Shepherd from crossing the Channel he will. But I promise you one thing, Dick, that may give you more comfort still—if Singleton fails to stop him I shall cross the Channel with Shepherd.'

'I'm glad to hear that, at any rate,' I gasped, still trotting along; 'but as I do not intend going with you I think I'll turn back now.'

'Don't give in yet. I may have another question or two to ask you. This is the best turn you have ever done me, Dick,' he

added, in a tone of jubilant excitement. 'Now I know where my old pal Shepherd is to be found, Bob Yorke's himself again. I'm saved, and at the very moment when I thought the game was up. You're sure he said Victoria?

· Yes. But how are you to get there by eleven to-morrow morning?' I asked. 'There are no more trains to-night, and the Sunday trains---

· I'll be there, if I have to beat Turpin's record, and ride all the way. A few steps more, old man, and vou shall see a steed that puts Bonny Black Bess in the background.'

A couple of vards farther on he turned into a field by a gate, and presently returned with a bicycle which he had left under the hedge.

· When shall I hear from you?' I asked, as he lit the lamp of his machine to examine a railway time-card.

'On Monday, if all goes right—I will send you a wire from Paris if I go there.'

'But if Singleton gets hold of Shepherd and induces him not to go?'

'Then,' said he, hastily extinguishing the light—'then I shall be back here to-morrow night, and the last act will be played out under your very eyes, Dick. Now,' he added, starting the machine, and getting into the saddle, 'Rugby Junction and victory!'

Without a sound he shot into the darkness and was lost to my sight in a moment.

Now, why had Yorke, who appeared so dejected and spiritless before he learnt of Shepherd's movements, been so suddenly elated and inspired with vigorous energy by the mere prospect of finding the curate before Singleton? And why, supposing him to be in his right mind, had he neglected to do that alone which he was so confident of performing in the company of Mr. Shepherd? Had

it never occurred to him to escape by the simple means of crossing the Channel, that before the idea of accompanying the curate suggested itself he abandoned the hope, and resigned himself to a fate which seemed inevitable?

I greatly regretted that I had not questioned Yorke on these points, though, as Jack observed, it was highly probable I should have had my pains for nothing. The mystery of the whole business plagued me vastly, and the more so because, by certain undecipherable signs in Jack's face and manner, I inferred that he had hit upon some satisfactory solution of the problem which he thought it advisable to keep to himself for the present.

All I could do was to hope that Yorke might arrive safely with the curate on the other side of the Channel and stay there; but I had little confidence in such a happy termination, having much more respect for Singleton's sagacity than for Yorke's audacity.

As soon as it grew dark on Sunday I became terribly anxious and uneasy, starting at every sound, quaking with fear when the milkman suddenly passed the window, and going out so frequently for a little turn in the garden that Kitty, observing my unusual behaviour, at length took alarm and asked me seriously if I felt unwell. It was a great relief when she and Jack went off to Moulsey Church in the evening, for that permitted me to watch for the return of Yorke from the corner of the garden which commanded a view of the road to Chester without any subterfuge. When it was too dark to see the road I prowled about the bridge until Jack and Kitty returned, and as I had seen nothing of Yorke I now began to think he must have escaped with the curate. Jack and I sat up till one, and by that time we both agreed that we might fairly believe

the danger was past. Nevertheless, I was down before seven o'clock the next morning, and having taken a turn round the place I strolled up to the village, thinking that perhaps Yorke had thought it advisable to turn in at the Crown for the night. The landlord was opening the stable-door, and, seeing me, he touched his cap, and said:

'You're out early, sir, this morn.'

'Yes,' said I, rubbing my hands cheerfully, 'the days are none too long now; we must make the most of 'em. The season's nearly over, though I dare say you still have a few visitors.

'No, sir, we ain't had neery a visitor for nigh on three weeks now.'

I stayed to chat with him for ten minutes or more, being greatly cheered by this information, which seemed to prove conclusively that Yorke had not returned; but the rest of our conversation was so unimportant that I cannot now recollect it.

I lengthened my stroll, for my mind was now in a condition to enjoy all that charms the senses on a fresh autumn morning, until my thoughts turned to the pleasant idea of breakfast, when I faced about and retraced my steps to the mill.

It was still early when I got back. Neither Kitty nor Jack had yet come down. Mrs. Bailey was bustling about in the breakfast-room, and so fully occupied that she had no time but to wish me 'good-morning' and exchange one or two observations on the weather. Little Jimmy was in the stable rubbing down the mare and hissing over the job like a man. I turned in to pat the mare and say 'how do you do' to the little lad.

'Good-morning to you, sir,' said he, raising the brush to his brow respectfully. 'Is that your velocipede, sir, in the coach 'ouse?'

'Velocipede, Jimmy!' I gasped in consternation.

For reply he led the way into the adjoining coach-house and pointed to a bicycle white with dust standing against the wall.

I said something incomprehensible enough, I dare say, to explain the presence of the machine, and told the lad to finish the mare as quickly as possible, that he might dig me a box of worms for fishing.

· Why, sir, I've just give her the last touch, and if you please, sir, I'll go and find the worms at once.'

I gave him twopence on the spot, for certainly a more obliging little lad never lived, and as he cluttered off over the pebbled yard, I glanced round for some further indication of Yorke's visit, for I could not doubt that it was he who had left the bicycle there. I saw that the coachhouse door closed simply with a latch. He might have come in at any hour of the night, but where had he gone afterwards?

In the corner beyond the machine there was a ladder stapled to the wall, leading through a hopper to the loft above. As I caught sight of this it occurred to me that Yorke had not gone, but was hiding up there in the loft. With a trembling step I climbed up the ladder and stepped off upon the loft floor. There were trusses of hay close to the hopper, but I could see nothing beyond, for there was no window to admit light.

I lit a vesta. As I struck it I heard a rustle in the darkness. As the flame brightened I saw Yorke on the loose hay, resting on one elbow and rubbing his eyes with the other hand.

- 'Yorke!' I exclaimed in a whisper; 'you have returned!'
- 'Looks like it,' he replied with a yawn.
 'What's the time?'
 - 'Nearly eight.'
 - 'Then I'll have another hour.'

The vesta was burning my fingers. As I

blew it out Yorke threw himself down with a grunt of satisfaction. He made no reply when I spoke again.

I felt my way across, led by his stertorous breathing, and, kneeling down, shook his arm to awake him.

- 'Yorke, Yorke!' said I.
- 'Let me alone, for heaven's sake!' he growled. 'Don't you see I'm dead beat?'
- 'I can't let you sleep till I know that you are safe. You must answer one question.
- 'Hang it all, you old nuisance, what do you want to know now?' he asked, rousing himself with an effort.
- 'Where is Shepherd? why have you not gone with him?'
- 'He didn't go. Singleton's got him. It will be all over in twenty-four hours.'
- 'And it is here, as you said, that the last act is to take place?'
 - 'Yes; but I shan't be called for another

hour, and that hour I mean to give to sleep. I shall need to be fresh for the part, so if you have any kindness in you, Dick, leave me. Call me at nine.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AT LAST KITTY AND HER FATHER MEET.

JACK was standing in the porch when I got down to the yard.

'What is it?' he asked, as I came quickly to him, seeing by my face and manner that something had happened.

'Yorke is here, sleeping like a log in the hayloft. Singleton has stopped Shepherd. It's all over.'

'Calm yourself a bit, Dick,' said he gently, as he slipped his arm through mine and led me slowly towards the orchard. 'We must not frighten Kitty out of her wits by a sudden shock.'

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'She can't be kept in the dark much longer.'

'It is scarcely advisable that she should be, but we must prepare her for the event.'

'There's but little time. Yorke expects something to happen shortly. He told me to call him at nine.'

Jack looked at his watch.

'Good. I will call him. He is in the loft, you say?'

'Yes. If you could persuade him, Jack, to do nothing desperate! I think he meditated suicide.'

'He wouldn't sleep if that were his intention, I think. Why should he come here for such a purpose? It is more probable that his object is to see Kitty before going to the other side of the world. This is another reason for preparing her.'

'How is this to be done?'

'Leave it to me. I will go to Yorke at nine, and come to an understanding with

him. There will be time enough after that to prepare Kitty.' After a minute's pause, he added: 'I hear her step behind us. If you can look a little less as if you were standing for your photograph, Dick, for heaven's sake do! Think of your breakfast, and pretend to have an appetite. We ought to begin at once; there's no time to lose.'

A little cough in our rear obliged us to turn. Kitty, smiling, and looking just as fresh and sweet as the morning in her light dress, was coming towards us.

'Have you come to tell us breakfast is ready?' I asked, smacking my lips.

I really did act my part well at the table -so well that Kitty's cheerful flow of spirits received no check, and we seemed to enjoy our breakfast as much as if Yorke were a thousand miles away. Jack was the first to rise, and, as the old clock on the stairs struck nine, he quietly left the room, while Kitty, who was already developing the habits of an admirable little housewife, occupied herself in putting away the serviettes in the corner press, and like matters.

Mrs. Bailey had not yet cleared the table, and I, still playing my part, lingered there, when Jack, coming to the open window, said:

'Bring a basket, Kitty, and help me to pick up the windfalls. You can leave the table as it is for half an hour.'

'That will please uncle scarcely less than it pleases me,' she replied, and, having fetched a basket from the kitchen, she joined Jack, and they went off with their arms closely linked towards the orchard. I watched them out of sight from the window, and then, turning my eye to the coachhouse, I saw Yorke coming from behind the trap. I ran out to the door, and met him there. He looked very grave. In his hand he carried a black knapsack; he was still dressed in the cyclist's suit he wore on Saturday.

Pushing past me, he entered the breakfastroom, and, standing by the table, he helped himself to some food, which he are ravenously.

'If there's a cup of tea left, let me have it,' he said with his mouth full.

I poured him out a cup of tea, too agitated to ask questions. He drank it off at a draught, and, taking another slice of breadand-butter, said, as he made his way towards the door:

'Show me your room. A wash will set me right.'

'I took him upstairs and led him into my room. He slipped off his jacket and opened the throat of his gray woollen shirt, running his eyes round the chamber as he did so.

- 'Where does that door lead?' he asked.
- 'Into Kitty's room,' I replied.
- 'Lock the door, and give me the key.'

I did as he bade me. He slipped the key

into his pocket, and filled the basin with water, still eating.

'Get your shaving tackle ready, and give my coat a brush.'

These orders I obeyed in silence, while he soused his head into the water and proceeded to soap and scrub himself vigorously. It was impossible to get an answer to the question or two I put from time to time. He could not or would not hear me. As he began to dry himself with the towel, his eye again ran round the room.

'I want a couple of yards of cord,' said he, and, as I put my finger to my forehead to think where I might find such a thing, he added: 'Box-cord will do.'

That reminded me that there was a cord round Kitty's empty box in the garret above. I ran up for it; when I returned, Yorke was shaving himself before the glass.

'That will do,' said he, after a glance at it. 'Now open my knapsack, and empty it.'

I undid the straps of the knapsack, wondering what it could contain. There was a suit of clothes, each garment tightly folded up; at the bottom was a felt hat. 'Oh, lord!' said I to myself, 'another disguise!'

'Shake 'em out, and lay the things smoothly on the bed.'

I unfolded them, and put the hat into shape. It was his clerical make-up.

'What the devil are you going to do now, Bob?' I asked, with an uncontrollable accent of impatience.

· Haven't you got a better razor than this?' was the only thing he vouchsafed in reply.

I found my best razor and laid it on the table before him in silence. He grunted approval, still rasping his chin with the other.

'What's the time now?' he asked, closing the razor with a snap.

'Half-past nine nearly.'

He paused, in brushing his hair, to listen,

and then, in a twinkling, finished his toilette and whipped on his jacket. With one more glance round the room, he went to the door, closed it as soon as I had passed out, locked it, and put the key carefully in his outer pocket.

I followed him as he ran quickly down-stairs: Jack's voice came from the breakfast-room.

The door was open; we went in, and Kitty and her father at length stood face to face.

She was by the window with Jack; her face was terribly pale. For an instant both stood motionless and silent, as if overcome by the emotion of this meeting; then Yorke strode forward with his hands stretched out, and she, tottering towards him, murmured almost inaudibly, 'My father!'

He would have taken her hands; but she, with an impulsive outburst of feeling, flung her arms round his neck and laid her cheek upon his breast, sobbing convulsively. Jack took my arm, and, leading me softly out of the room, gently closed the door upon a scene which was not for us to see.

'What is he going to do?' I asked when we were in the garden.

I can no more answer that question than you, Jack replied. I have not the slightest idea what his plans are; I only know that he expects Singleton and the police to turn up some time this morning; and he has asked me to keep an eye on the road, and warn him when the enemy is in sight. We can sit down here and smoke a pipe, Dick. We have a fair stretch of the road in view; probably they will come over in a conveyance. I can see nothing in the road: can you?

I replied briefly in the negative, and, seating myself on the low wall beside him, pulled out my pipe in silence.

Seeing that I was mortified by his reserve, Jack, after lighting his pipe, said, with kindly sympathy in his voice:

- 'Feel a bit hurt, Dick?'
- 'Yes,' I answered; 'Yorke has not given me one word of explanation—that doesn't surprise or wound me much, for he's used me pretty roughly all through. But I can see that you know more than you care to tell me, and it's the first time, Jack, that you have ever treated me as though I were untrustworthy.'
- 'Yorke has told me no more than I had already conjectured. He has simply confirmed a supposition that has been floating in my mind for some little time past. In three words—no more than three words—he explained the whole mystery; but as he exacted a promise that I would repeat those words to no one but Kitty, you must not ascribe a want of kindness to my silence. Though, to be candid, Dick,' he added, after a minute's reflection, 'if I had given no promise I should still think it advisable to keep you in ignorance a little longer.'

I liked Jack none the less for this honest and characteristic admission, and, feeling that he was more far-sighted and wiser than I, and that in consequence the course which seemed best to him was the best for others also, I resigned myself with a good grace to my forced condition of ignorance, and watched the road, trying to find out for myself what those three words were which explained everything.

And now, while I am supposed to be watching for the arrival of Singleton and the police, I will venture again to take a liberty with the form of my narrative, and relate what happened to prevent Mr. Shepherd leaving London as he intended on Sunday, the facts having since been given me by Singleton himself.

Half an hour before the train was to start, Mr. Shepherd was in the booking-office at Victoria, waiting for the pay-box to open, his Gladstone bag in one hand, his fare accurately counted in the other, when Singleton tapped him on the shoulder.

'Oh! Mr. Singleton, is that you?' said the curate, with a sickly smile, as he turned and recognised the detective. 'So pleased to see you!'

'Thank you, sir, same to you,' replied Singleton; 'will you be kind enough to step this way?'

'So sorry, but I really cannot just now. I am waiting to take my little ticket.'

'You won't be able to travel by this line to-day, sir; you've got to come along with me to Chester.'

'Oh no! I object to going to Chester. I know what you want, Mr. Singleton,' he pursued, his face growing longer, his air more serious, his speech more hurried. 'You wish me to be a witness in the late distressing affair at the Vicarage; but I have quite made up my mind that I will have nothing to do with it whatever—no, no; no, thank

you. I firmly decline to have anything whatever to do with it.'

'I don't wish to make it unpleasant for you, Mr. Shepherd, though you've given me a lot of trouble, but I cannot allow you to slip through my fingers again. You see that young man over there—well, he's a plainclothes policeman, and I've a warrant in my pocket here to arrest you.'

'Arrest me, wh-wh-what for?' asked the curate, trembling violently, as he quitted the ticket-office.

'I've a couple of witnesses who saw you at the Vicarage last week, and they have sworn before a magistrate that you are the same party they saw on the twelfth of June sling the murdered gentleman down the well, and on that evidence I've got the warrant for your arrest.'

'Last week! why, I was at Camberwell on that day. I can prove it, that I can.'

'I am quite willing to believe you, sir. In

fact, it's my belief that Mr. Shuttle dressed himself up to look like you, knowing we were on the look-out, in order to throw suspicion on you. But it isn't likely he'll keep up that disguise to oblige us. We must prove that it was Shuttle, and not you, by bringing you both face to face with the witnesses. Come, sir, you've nothing to fear with those whiskers on. Shuttle shaved for the occasion, and can't have grown a beard since. The witnesses must declare against him. It's to your advantage to prove the fact before Shuttle can start a beard. Besides which, it is Hobson's choice, like. If you don't convict him, the witnesses will swear through thick and thin it was you, just to get the reward, and you'll swing for it.'

This threat, and the absence of any alternative, decided Mr. Shepherd to submit to the guidance of Singleton, and instead of going to Paris he went that afternoon with Mr. Singleton to Chester.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE ADMIRAL DECIDES THAT YORKE AND SHEPHERD SHALL FIGHT IT OUT.

We had been watching the road ten minutes, when Jack directed my attention to a speck in the distance, but after that some time passed before we could make out whether it was a man or a vehicle, and then we could not decide whether it was cart or carriage. At the bend of the road the high hedges concealed it completely from sight, and a long interval followed before we saw it again. Then suddenly it came into sight on the straight bit of road leading to the mill bridge, near enough for us to distinguish that it was

a covered fly, and that the driver was urging his horse on with whip and rein. Almost at the same moment I discovered a second vehicle on the further side of the long bend.

'That's an open cart with four or five men in it,' Jack declared, when I pointed it out. 'We must let Yorke know.'

I stayed outside in the porch, while Jack went in to warn Yorke, my wounded pride prompting me to do nothing, rather than to busy myself uselessly in an affair beyond my comprehension, like Auguste in a circus. Presently Yorke came to my side; there were traces of emotion in his face which softened my heart towards him. The hard, callous, determined set of features was replaced by the tender and amiable expression which endeared him to his friends in the early days. Pulling himself together as if to dispel some lingering sentiment, he glanced out to the gateway, listened intently for an instant, then crossed the vard,

entering the coach-house on the opposite side just as the fly turned the corner and rattled up to where I stood. Simultaneously Jack and Kitty came to the door.

To our surprise, instead of Singleton and the police, Admiral Strong and his handsome daughter stepped out of the carriage.

'How d'ye do all?' cried the Admiral with a wave of his hand, to dispense with other formalities. 'Now then, Nell, my girl, you've undertaken to do the piloting through these ticklish straits, so at it you go at once.'

Miss Strong looked very anxious and earnest as she took Kitty's hand, and there was a true ring of affection and sympathy in her voice as she said:

'We have come to speak to you, dear Miss Yorke, on a matter of great importance—of such pressing importance that it scarcely admits of being broken delicately.'

'Ay, that's it,' growled the Admiral, scrubbing his chin with his hand impatiently,

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as we followed Kitty and Miss Strong into the long room. 'It's so amazingly delicate that I'm not to open my mouth lest I stick my foot in it and offend everyone.'

'Pray speak without any reserve,' said Kitty; 'there is no need of formality between friends.'

'There, Nell, didn't I tell you that little Miss Kitty was too sensible for such stuff and nonsense?'

'Well, dear,' said Miss Strong, 'last evening, when we came home from church——'

'Ah, ta, ta, ta!' exclaimed the Admiral in disgust, 'now for half an hour's rigmarole because the matter's so pressing. However, I say nothing. I'm mum.'

'We found that horrid detective, Mr. Singleton, waiting to see papa.'

'Look here, Nell, my girl,' the Admiral expostulated, 'what's the use of the man half flaying his horse to get here quickly if

you're going to spin a yarn as long as a three months' log? I haven't said a word up to now, but hang me if I can keep quiet any longer! I take it we're all friends here, and seeing that we've come to do a friendly service, nought but want of sense can lead anyone to take offence. Miss Kitty, we're told that my neighbour, who called himself Decimus Shuttle, is Robert Yorke, your father. Singleton has heard from that sneaking son of a — baggage that you are here; and he's coming here as sure as fate to look for him. That's the whole story. Now, if Shuttle is not Yorke there's an end of the matter, and you can just laugh at us for hunting of mares' nests-and none will join in more heartily than I; but if he is your father, why then, my dear, there's the fly out there and he's welcome to take my place in it alongside Nell and whip off out of danger. There, that's all the harm we have to wrap up in such a mighty lot of delicacy.'

Yorke stood on the threshold. He stepped into the room, taking off his cap, and faced the Admiral and his daughter.

'I am Kitty's father,' he said quietly.

'Then come, Nell,' cried the Admiral briskly; 'lose no more time, my girl.'

Miss Strong rose with alacrity from the chair she had taken in indignation when her father began his explanation.

'I thank you, Miss Strong, with all my heart,' said Yorke. 'There are not many young ladies who would sit beside a man charged with the crimes brought against me, and with no proof of my innocence except the fact that this is my daughter,' he added, laying his hand on Kitty's shoulder.

'Come, this palaver may be done in the fly; now, off with you.'

'Too late,' replied Yorke calmly; 'Singleton is out there with a friend of yours, Admiral.'

As all eyes were turned towards the

courtyard, Yorke stepped back into the entrance hall, beckoning me to follow.

'When you see that they are likely to search for me upstairs,' said he quickly, 'come and warn me. You will find me in your room.'

He turned and ran swiftly upstairs. I went to the front-door and peeped out. Singleton was not in sight, but a cart was drawn up at the gate, and Mr. Shepherd was coming towards the porch with his jaunty step. I hastened back to the long room, and had scarcely communicated this information when a light rap was heard at the front-door. Jack went out to receive the visitors.

Overcome with fearful anticipation, I sank into a chair; Kitty and Miss Strong sat side by side near the window, their hands clasped; the Admiral stood against the chimney, his feet planted well apart and his arms folded: we were all silent, waiting to hear what followed.

^{&#}x27; How do you do, my deah Mr. Sherridan?

I am so pleased to see you, for I have something of very great consequence to tell you. But I hope I shall not detain you very long, for I see you are going out for a drive in that carriage.'

'Come in,' said Jack, leading the way into the room. The curate, following, stopped at the door, astonished to find the company there, and the smile disappeared from his face as he met the uncompromising scowl with which the Admiral regarded him. Then, recovering his equanimity, he stepped forward, beaming again.

'This is *indeed* a pleasant surprise, deah Admiral Strong.'

'Don't speak to me, sir, or I shall twist your head off—I know I shall,' the Admiral growled.

'Oh, how very unkind of you! But I am sure you will not be so wanting in British gallantry as to commit any act of violence in the presence of these deah ladies. Mr.

Sherridan,' he added, evidently less confident of the Admiral's self-restraint than he pretended to be, 'I must ask you to let me speak to you in private, for my mission is one of a very particular nature.'

'I have no secret from anyone here,' said Jack.

But when I tell you that it concerns the happiness and the welfare and the honour of Miss Yorke, my deah Mr. Sherridan?

'That is another reason for saying what you have to say in her presence.'

'As you please, but I feah you will be very sorry for this,' said the curate, shaking his head ruefully, as he seated himself on the edge of a chair.

He sat in the full light of the window, and surely that light never fell on a more despicable wretch than he appeared, his face livid and lined with anxiety and apprehension, the semblance of complacency only marking more strongly the signs of abject fear in his expression, and his attitude suggestive of nothing but the cringing humility of a coward. And the hypocrisy of the man was marked by the incongruity of those personal characteristics with the airy and festive suit of clothes he had donned for his trip to Paris.

'Well, my deah friends,' he continued, blinking at us one after the other, 'I regret to tell you that I am a bearah of evil tidings, and I must beg you to prepare for a very terrible shock—especially you, my deah Miss Kitty; and you, deah Mr. Sherridan, must prepare for a terrible shock; and for you also, deah Mr. Holderness, the shock will be terrible.'

'Come to the point as quickly as possible, if you please,' said Jack.

'I will come to the point without delay, and the point is this, deah friends: I have been informed, by a person whose veracity I have no reason to doubt, that the gentleman

you all know by the name of Mr. Shuttle is not Mr. Shuttle, but one Robert Yorke, and this Robert Yorke is deah Miss Kitty's fathah. Now, when I heard this distressing fact I was about to take a long journey, as you know, deah Mr. Holderness; but I said to myself, "This man has been very good to me-very generous and kind-and his daughtah is a very amiable and deserving young lady, and her uncle is a very nice old gentleman, and Mr. Sherridan is a very handsome and estimable young man, and all these deah good people must suffer tribulation and grief if Robert Yorke is brought to a shameful and ignominious end. Shall I continue my pleasure trip and abandon Robert Yorke to his fate and my deah friends to the unhappy consequences, when it is in my power to avert this calamity? No, I will not. I will warn Robert Yorke of his peril, and if it be necessary I will aid him with my hand and with my purse to escape." And so, instead of going to Paris, I turned my footsteps and came to Chester. And the first thing I did on my arrival was to seek Robert Yorke at the Vicarage, where I had left him, but he was not there. Then it came to me in the night that surely he had gone to seek his daughtah, and take sheltah undah the roof of deah Mr. Sherridan. And again I asked myself if I should relinquish my purpose or not. And my heart told me not to leave the good work unfinished, for the same informant who told me that Mr. Shuttle was Robert Yorke told me also that Mr. Singleton, the detective officer, was seeking him in Chester. And so this morning I went to a worthy man, who is a bakah by trade, and asked him if he would take me to Moulsey Mill to fetch a friend of mine, and when we had agreed upon the price we started and came hithah without loss of time. And now, my deah friends, the bakah's cart stands at the gate, and if Robert Yorke will take a seat in it the bakah's man shall drive him hence to Barnsley Station, where he may make good his escape ere Mr. Singleton overtake him.'

'May I be shot if I hang fire any longer!' roared the Admiral, shaking his fist at the curate. 'Why, you miserable, hypocritical, lying, canting, drivelling, snivelling rat, Singleton told me all last night. You yourself suggested that Robert Yorke was here the moment you heard his name: you yourself offered to decoy him under the pretence of helping him to escape.'

The Rev. Crawley Shepherd waited to hear no more than this. He had dropped his hand into his jacket pocket the moment Admiral Strong raised his fist; he now sprang to his feet, and, whipping out a metal dog-whistle, put it to his lips, and blew frantically, retreating towards the door. The next moment Singleton and another man appeared on the scene.

'I claim your protection, Mr. Singleton, against this wicked old ruffian,' cried Shepherd. 'You promised to shield me when I blew this whistle.'

'I told you to blow when you were in danger from Yorke. Where is he?'

'He's in the house, I know he is. They've brought that fly to take him away. They're all in league togethah—a gang of wicked robbers and play-actors.'

I thought it time to warn Yorke, and, slipping as quietly as I could from the room, made for the stairs. But my movement did not escape the observation of Shepherd.

'There's that wicked old man gone upstairs,' he cried. 'Yorke is up there; he will escape by the window. Policeman, do your duty—arrest the whole lot.'

I heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs as I reached the landing above. I burst into my bedroom, calling to Yorke to save himself. He was sitting on the side of

the bed. He rose and stood just behind the door, not attempting to close it. The sound of hurrying footsteps drew nearer, mingled with incoherent cries of remonstrance and terror from the curate, and then he shot into the room as if he had been thrown in by force.

'There,' cried the Admiral, as he pulled the door to with a bang; 'let 'em fight it out, and may the best man win!'

CHAPTER L.

YORKE PLAYS ONE MORE PART, AND ACTS AS VALET DE CHAMBRE TO MR. SHEPHERD.

As the curate dashed up against the washstand, Yorke stepped forward, laid hold of him by the body, carried him across the room, and threw him like a sack of rags on the edge of the bed, face downwards, where he lay supine and gasping for breath, too terrified even to scream.

'Bring me that chair, Dick,' said Yorke, in a quick, cheerful tone.

'Fit it to his back, so,' he continued, holding the curate down by the nape of the neck, while with the other hand he

accommodated the chair to the angle of the reverend gentleman's body.

'Now that cord—pass it under his arms and chest, now over the back of the chair, again under his arms and chest. Bring the two ends round to the back. That's right. Pull them tight. Don't be afraid—another pull. Now tie the ends. Another knot—that will do.'

Following these directions as they were given, I finished by securing the chair firmly to the groaning curate, and in such a manner that, when Yorke raised him from the bed and set the chair in its ordinary position, there was Mr. Shepherd sitting down with his arms pinioned close to his sides.

Having twisted him round so as to face the light, Yorke went to the dressing-table, and, taking up my best razor, opened it and gave it one or two passes across the palm of his hand with a malicious grin at his victim.

Mr. Shepherd watched these terrible

preparations with a horror that completely paralyzed his faculties. He tried to rise—his shaking knees gave way and he sank back inert; he tried to scream—his voice rattled in his throat; with gaping mouth and starting eyes he shook his head like a paralytic, while the sweat trickled down his livid cheek.

I myself was terrified.

'Bob,' said I, in a tone of remonstrance, 'you mustn't do that.' For the moment I really fancied he was about to cut the curate's throat, and so did the quaking Shepherd.

'Deah, deah Mr. Holderness, save me, save me! Oh, deah Mr. Yorke, spare me this once!' the miserable wretch faltered, my intercession reviving a spark of hope.

Bob approached, still stropping the razor on his hand. The curate tried to throw himself upon the floor by tilting back the chair. Yorke seized him by the hair, and, setting him again in position, said:

'If you attempt to move, if you open your mouth, I'll do it as sure as you are sitting there.'

With cringing humility the curate closed his lips, pleading mutely for mercy.

'Hold that,' said Yorke, putting the razor in my hand. Then he went to the washstand and fetched the soap-dish and my shaving brush, with which he worked up a fine lather.

'You've a little too much hair on your face, Mr. Shepherd,' he said; 'it doesn't become you. Your old friends wouldn't know you again with that on. We must have it off.'

With that he handed me the soap-dish, and, taking hold of the curate's nose, proceeded to lather his cheeks and lips with the quick dexterity of a practised barber.

'Now for that razor, Dick. Don't move, sir,' he added, addressing Mr. Shepherd. 53 VOL. III.

'You may get an ugly cut that will not add to your beauty.'

With amazing celerity he shaved off the curate's moustache, then, after a fresh application of lather, he shaved away his whiskers, dropping occasional remarks of a bantering kind on the difficulty of finding good dyes for the hair, the question whether professional men should wear whiskers or not, and the like, and describing a curve in the air with the flashing razor whenever the gasping curate made the slightest movement.

In five minutes the operation was completed; not a trace was left on the curate's face of the dark beard which had so altered his appearance.

'You begin to look more like yourself,' said Yorke, eyeing him critically, as he closed the razor and handed it to me. 'It's only that light suit of clothes that looks so out of place. However,' he added, as he untied the cord that bound the curate to the chair,

'now that you have the use of your arms, you will oblige me by taking it off.'

'I—I—I don't understand you,' stammered Mr. Shepherd, as he rose painfully from the chair and faced Yorke, who stood between him and the door. 'I do not know what you mean.'

'Strip,' answered Yorke, in a tone of command that was not to be misunder-stood.

The curate looked round him in bewilderment; then suddenly, as he caught sight of the other door, that communicating with Kitty's room, he made a dash for escape, twisting and wrenching the handle in a furious effort to open it. Then, finding the door locked and escape impossible, his hands dropped like lead to his side, and he stood panting for breath and quaking with apprehension of punishment for the attempt.

Yorke had not stirred a step, but stood eyeing the curate like a tamer watching the

efforts of a wild beast to force the bars of its cage, and the curate looked not less like the cowering brute who, deprived of all energy and courage, waits only for a commanding word to sullenly obey.

'Strip!' repeated Yorke, in the same stern tone, and nodding at the curate's black suit, laid out on the bed; 'there are the clothes you are to wear.'

A perception of Yorke's object now flashed upon me; it was not less obvious to Shepherd. He glanced from the clothes to Yorke; opened his mouth to speak, with a wild gesture of supplication; then, perceiving the utter uselessness of appeal or resistance, he dropped into a chair, and raised his nerveless fingers to remove his brilliant cravat.

I helped the miserable wretch to change his things, for he seemed to have nearly lost all mental and physical capacity for action, and his spirits were so completely cast down that he tried to give me a smile of tearful gratitude as I unfastened the buttons of his waistcoat.

He rallied a little, however, by the time he had got his shivering legs into his black trousers, and when Yorke, stepping forward, picked up his discarded clothes, he started to his feet and made a grab at them. Yorke quietly pushed him back in his chair, and took the clothes to the bed, where he proceeded to shake them out carefully.

'I defy you to touch anything contained in my pockets!' cried the curate. 'This is an abominable outrage, and you shall be punished for it very severely if there is any justice in the land.'

'You shall have as much justice as you want. All in good time. Get your clothes on,' answered Yorke, as he folded up the clothes neatly.

Another access of terror shook the wretched man. It was as much as he could do to stand on his legs as I thrust his limp arms into the sleeves of his coat. At length the last button was fastened, and Shepherd was transformed from the airy tourist to the sombre curate again.

'Come, that's something like,' said Yorke, glancing at him as he crossed to fetch a towel from the horse. 'Give him a glass of water. His trouble is not all over yet.'

I filled a glass and gave it to Shepherd. He put it to his lips with feverish eagerness, and afterwards nursed it on his knee, taking a sip from it now and then, and ruefully watching Yorke between while as he tied up his travelling suit in the towel.

We were so silent that I could hear the murmur of voices in the room below, and above this I presently caught the sound of wheels in the yard.

'Can you see who that is, Dick?' Yorke asked.

I went to the corner window, which looked over part of the yard, and, peering out, saw some men getting down from a covered carrier's cart. Two of them I identified at once as the witnesses Singleton had procured, and in the wiry old man who stepped down briskly after them I recognised Yorke's mysterious companion, Roberts. The fourth was a policeman, who by his appearance I took to be an inspector.

The sight of these men revived my alarm, for I saw only partly through Yorke's design, and was doubtful whether, now that he had so altered Shepherd's appearance as to lead the witnesses to identify him with the man they had sworn to in the shrubbery, he himself intended to face justice or fly.

'Roberts is there,' said I to him quickly, 'and Singleton's two witnesses, with an officer of police.'

They've timed it very well,' said he, seating himself on the bed with perfect composure. 'There's nothing more to be done but to wait till the police come up for us.'

CHAPTER LI.

THE MAN WHO PLAYED MANY PARTS.

The sound of another vehicle rattling into the yard took me again to the window. I could see but the back of a brightly painted dog-cart, from which a smart livery-servant was stepping down. When I reported this new arrival to Yorke, and asked him if he knew who it was, he replied:

'I have not the slightest idea. Go down, and see for yourself.'

I was in a fever of anxiety and curiosity to know what was going on below, being quite at a loss to understand Singleton's long inactivity, for no one had come near the room during the time occupied in metamorphosing Mr. Shepherd, so I eagerly accepted this proposal, and ran downstairs.

In the passage I met Mrs. Bailey, who was coming from the long room with the breakfast things.

'Lord, Mr. Holderness!' said she. 'what is all this to do? There's policemen and all sorts of parties about, and here is Sir Thomas Thorne, from Moulsey Court, just come with his secretary.'

'My dear soul,' I replied, 'I am as much in the dark as you are;' and, passing on, I entered the long room in a flutter of excitement.

Sir Thomas Thorne, a hale, elderly gentleman with a magisterial air, was standing at the head of the table, his secretary sitting behind him at the little desk by the window, with a shorthand notebook before him, and sharpening a pencil. The police-inspector stood on his left, and Jack and the Admiral on the right-hand side of the table, Kitty and Miss Strong sitting between them. Singleton stood opposite them with the plain-clothes policeman a little in the rear. Sir Thomas Thorne was speaking.

'Then, as I understand you, Mr. Singleton,' he said, 'you wish me to preside over an informal court of inquiry?'

'Precisely so, sir.'

'I do not know whether it is quite regular or not; but if you see no technical objection, Mr. Inspector——'

'There is none that I know of, Sir Thomas. Mr. Singleton's object——'

'Pardon me,' said Singleton, interrupting; 'I will explain the circumstances to Sir Thomas Thorne, with your permission.'

There was a pause as Sir Thomas seated himself, and after him the Admiral, Jack, and I seated ourselves, then Singleton continued:

'As you are doubtless aware, sir, the body

of the Reverend Mr. Sherridan, Vicar of St. Botolph's, was found under conditions which excited strong suspicion that he had been murdered. That suspicion was strengthened by the fact that a certain sum of money, a will, and other documents contained in a sandal-wood box were missing. The sandalwood box I received from Robert Yorke, and circumstances led me to infer that the Vicar was murdered and robbed by the person whom I shall presently bring before you. I had information, of a not very reliable kind, that two men boasted of being able to bring the murderer to justice. These men, I had reason to believe, were common card-sharpers. As you are doubtless aware, sir, it is extremely difficult to induce men of that kind to go into a witness-box. Their acquaintance with courts of justice is usually of an unpleasant kind, and cross-examination is pretty sure to bring out facts in their history which they have reason to conceal. I found means to tempt them by the offer of a large reward, and after trying to compound with felony they came to me.'

'In what way did they attempt to compound with felony?' asked Sir Thomas Thorne.

'I can prove that they undertook to be silent on condition that the suspected criminal paid them the amount offered for their evidence.'

'I understand—a pair of rascals!'

'Undoubtedly, sir. The fact that they were a pair of rascals, and that their rascality could be proved, made it most important that before putting them in the witness-box the reliability of their evidence should be ascertained beyond all question. There was evidence enough to arrest the criminal, but whether conviction would follow depended entirely upon the behaviour of our witnesses under examination. A jury very properly regards bought evidence—evidence procured

by the promise of a large reward—with suspicion, and any hesitation on the part of these witnesses, any flaw in their testimony, would probably result in the discharge of the prisoner and our stultification.'

'Quite so,' said Sir Thomas, with a grave shake of the head.

'Our first object was to discover whether the man we suspected and the man they indicated were identical. To this end, with the kind assistance of Admiral Strong, we introduced our two card-sharpers into the shrubbery of the Vicarage, where they saw the suspected party under nearly the same conditions with regard to distance and light which existed on the morning when they swear to having seen the murderer dispose of his victim. Without hesitation they declared that this was the man they had seen. But, sir, we knew that the person they identified was disguised to represent somebody else. Now, here lay our difficulty; at the trial this

person might throw our witnesses into confusion and doubt by appearing without his disguise.'

'So that, as I understand it, you were no further advanced in the matter by the experiment.'

'Pardon me, sir, the experiment proved one important fact: The criminal was either the curate of St. Botolph's, the Reverend Mr. Crawley Shepherd, or a man made up to represent him. We have not the slightest doubt as to which of the two it was, but to avoid the possibility of his wriggling out of the prisoner's dock, we resolved to put the witnesses to another test by confronting them with both men before making our arrest. We have succeeded in bringing them all here; the witnesses are in the next room, the curate of St. Botolph's and Robert Yorke, who personated him, are upstairs. And that this examination might be made before disinterested witnesses, we have called upon you,

sir, as a Justice of the Peace, to be present; and we have also brought Admiral Strong here.'

· Hold there! cried the Admiral; 'as you pretend to be so vastly anxious to have everything aboveboard, it may be as well to tell Sir Thomas Thorne that you did not bring me at all. I came here perfectly of my own free will.'

'True, sir.' replied Singleton, with a pleasant smile. 'But you would not have come had I not taken the precaution to inform you last night that the person implicated with the curate was Robert Yorke, the father of the young lady there, your daughter's friend, and the attianced wife of your friend Mr. John Vernon Sherridan, and that he was in hiding here. You came to put him on his guard; but you are here now to serve the ends of justice.'

'What! 'twas nought but a trap! I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Singleton,' and, dropping his voice, he added: 'and be d—d to you!'

'You shall have no reason to regret it, sir,' said Singleton, and, turning again to Sir Thomas Thorne, he continued:

'Now, sir, I have explained the case, and with your permission I will send for Robert Yorke and the Reverend Mr. Shepherd, and then bring the witnesses face to face with them to decide which of the two they saw on May 12 disposing of the murdered Vicar's body.'

'You raise no objection, Mr. Inspector?' Sir Thomas asked.

'None, sir.'

Sir Thomas nodded assent to the officer at his elbow, who immediately left the room. An awkward pause followed, in which Sir Thomas spoke in an undertone with his secretary, who had been making notes, in order to avoid regarding those who were compromised by their relations with Robert

Yorke. Presently the sound of footsteps drew all eves to the door as the policeman returned with Yorke and the curate.

Mr. Shepherd no sooner caught sight of Sir Thomas Thorne than a joyous smile lighted his wobegone face, and, stepping forward with clasped hands, he exclaimed:

'This is indeed providential! My dear Sir Thomas, as a friend——'

Sir Thomas checked him with a repressive movement of his hand, and said, with prodigious dignity:

'Mr. Shepherd, I am here in the character of a magistrate, and know no one as a friend.'

'These are the two men,' said Singleton briskly: 'Robert Yorke and the Reverend Crawley Shepherd. Sit down there, if you please.' He indicated a couple of chairs against the wall, where Yorke and the curate seated themselves, partly screened by the open door. 'Now we will call the two witnesses.'

The policeman slipped out, and returned VOL. III. 54

in a minute with the two witnesses, who stood at the end of the table, facing Sir Thomas, with their eyes fixed straight before them, looking as if they themselves had to answer the charge of murder.

The inspector cleared his throat and spoke.

- 'I must warn all parties concerned,' said he, 'that any statement made here may be taken in evidence against them.'
- 'Your name, I believe,' said Singleton, addressing the witness in velveteen, 'is William Wright?'
- 'Yus, sir,' answered the man, in the hoarse voice peculiar to his class.
- 'And yours?' Singleton asked, addressing his companion.
 - 'James Maffews, sir.'
 - 'James Matthews.'
- 'Now, on May 12, being in the grounds of the Vicarage of St. Botolph's, you both saw a man carry the body of a white-haired

old gentleman to the edge of a well, attach the bucket-chain to his neck, and by that means lower him into the well?'

- Afore he lowered of him down,' said Matthews, anxious to be correct, 'he had for to wind him up wiv the crank to get him over the edge of the well - didn't he, Bill ?'
- 'Yus; and when he'd got of him up, the old gentleman swung over the edge, a-turnin' round and round like as if he was a roastin' jack.'
- 'Very good. Now, on the 16th instant, you went again into the Vicarage grounds with me, and there you saw a man whom you identified as the man you had previously seen ?'
 - 'Yus, sir,' both witnesses replied.
- 'Look round the room, if you please, and tell us if you see that person here.'

In dead silence the two men slowly looked round the table, and then, their eyes resting. last of all, on the curate, they cried with one voice:

- 'That's him—that's the very man we see!'
- 'You wicked story-telling men!' exclaimed the curate, trembling in every limb.
- 'One moment,' said Singleton. 'Is Mr. Holderness here?'

With a quaking reluctance I came forward from the retired position I had taken, inwardly cursing my folly for not absenting myself, and answered to the call.

- 'Mr. Holderness, you were with us on the 16th inst, when these witnesses identified the man they swear to having seen on the 12th of May?'
 - 'Yes,' I replied faintly.
- 'In outward appearance that man resembled the curate of St. Botolph's?'

Again I feebly admitted the fact.

'But you were perfectly well aware at the time that it was not Mr. Shepherd?'

I hesitated a moment.

'Answer me at once,' said Singleton sternly.

'I must admit that I knew it was not Mr. Shepherd,' I answered, a deathly faintness creeping over me.

'Deah, deah Mr. Holderness!' exclaimed the curate, in an ecstasy; 'my preserver generous, truthful, upright old gentleman!'

'You knew, then, that it was the man who sits there, your brother-in-law. Robert Yorke?'

'I cannot deny it,' I murmured faintly.

'Deah, deah friend!' exclaimed Mr. Shepherd.

'Now.' Singleton said, turning to the perplexed witnesses, 'you have heard the unwilling testimony of this gentleman. What have you to say? Answer me one at a time. What is your reply, William Wright?'

The two men looked at each other and at the curate in bewilderment; then Wright, recovering from his stupefaction, said with dogged determination:

'Wall, all I've got to say is this here—Mr. Yorke may have faked himself up to look like the parson; but it was the parson, and not him, I see sling the dead body over the well.'

'What do you say, Matthews?'

'I'll take my dying oaf, sir, it was the parson. Lookee here, gentlemen, and your worship. It was pretty nigh dark when we saw the party on the grass plat in front of the 'ouse, and then we was a longish way off. But mark this here, gentlemen—it was half an hour lighter when we see him close to at the well. In front of the 'ouse we could just make out his body and a bit of a white face; but at the well we could spot all his countinance wivout any error. Why, look at him now'— the curate had forced a smile of innocence on his ashy face—'it's the very same puttyish colour of his skin, and

the same grin he had on him as the old gentleman twisted round on the end of the chain.'

'On this evidence,' said Singleton in triumph, 'I call upon you, Mr. Inspector, to arrest the Rev. Crawley Shepherd for the murder of the Vicar of St. Botolph's.'

The inspector nodded to the plain-clothes policeman, who, with astonishing celerity, slipped a pair of handcuffs on Mr. Shepherd's nerveless wrists, and locked them with a snap.

'The evidence certainly seems conclusive,' said Sir Thomas Thorne; 'the witnesses appear to be telling the truth; but before I commit,' he added, dropping his voice, 'I should like to have more convincing proof that the man they saw on the first occasion was not Robert Yorke cunningly disguised.'

'That proof is forthcoming, sir,' replied Singleton; 'I can show beyond doubt that Robert Yorke was with me at the time of the murder.'

- 'With you-in what relation?'
- 'In the relation that has existed between us for the past seven months—Robert Yorke is my employer.'
- 'Your employer!' exclaimed the Admiral; 'why, hang me if here's not another mine sprung upon me!'
- 'My employer,' repeated Singleton; 'the business is carried on in my name, but, as a matter of fact, not a step has been taken in this affair from beginning to end which was not directed by Mr. Yorke.'

CHAPTER LII.

WHICH ENDS THIS STRANGE, EVENTFUL HISTORY.

There was a general movement, which was checked by Yorke, who, coming to the table, said:

'One moment, if you please, Sir Thomas. Before you leave I should like to bring one more point in this case under your notice. The sandal - wood box — which, I may observe, was found by a lad on the edge of the river, bordering the race-course, where it had probably been placed by the thief to throw suspicion on some turf followers in whose hands the police might have found it —is supposed to have contained a will and a

considerable sum in bank notes. A will has been produced by the prisoner Shepherd, which he declares he took from one of my boxes at the Vicarage the day before he decamped. That he did not take it from my box will, in due course, be proved by my man there, Roberts, who occupied the room in which my boxes were locked during the whole time of my absence. He will show that Shepherd did not even trouble himself to pick the lock of the door with the instrument furnished by Singleton for that purpose. Had he tried he would have failed, for the simple reason that the key was in the lock inside. One will, as I say, has been produced, but I have learnt quite recently that a second, a later will, which revokes the first, is still in his possession. At any rate, it was in his possession, in all probability, yesterday morning at the moment he was about to take a ticket for Paris. His object in leaving England was, I suspect, to evade the possibility of being arrested, to get money for the will if he could find a purchaser, and to circulate the notes, which he could not with safety change in this country. We have his travelling bag, and the suit of clothes he wore yesterday, and as it is most likely that he carried all that he valued with him. I think an examination of these things will bring further evidence to light. The clothes are in a bundle on the bed upstairs, Roberts—fetch them. You have the Gladstone bug, Singleton?

Yes, sir, replied Singleton, rising to seek it.

The miserable curate, who had been sitting with his face buried in his manacled hands, suddenly roused himself, and in a tone of despair cried:

'I can bear it no longer. I throw myself upon your mercy, Sir Thomas Thorne. I will confess everything, for I am less guilty than this shameful persecution would lead you to suppose—

'I advise you to reserve your defence,' said Sir Thomas. 'I am not your judge; it is not in my power to help you, even if I had the desire to do so.'

'That makes no difference, sir; I must relieve my soul of its burden.'

'Remember your statement will be taken in evidence at the trial,' said the inspector.

'I cannot help it. I must speak. My feelings are too terrible for silence. I plead guilty to the theft, but not to the murder. You need not trouble to go for that bag, Mr. Singleton; the notes will be found in the breast-pocket of my coat. I restore them all. Not one is missing. And the will is there likewise in my little notebook—the will,' he added, with a malicious leer at Miss Strong, 'which deprives you of half your fortune; and that is all you get, Admiral Strong, by hunting me down in this shameful manner.'

'It's all I want to get,' cried the Admiral, smacking his leg in delight, 'except the

satisfaction of seeing you duly punished, and I shan't have long to wait for that.'

'You'll be disappointed there, too, you vindictive, unfeeling old heathen, for I shall not be punished so much as you expect. Providence will not permit me to be punished for a crime I did not commit. I affirm most solemnly that I am guiltless of murder. On the last day of his life my deah old master was extremely unwell. He felt, I am quite sure, that the hand of Death was upon him, for he spent the whole evening in reading letters, which clearly had not been opened for many years, and these added greatly to the mental suffering inflicted by his undutiful grandson. He was extremely cross and extremely unkind to me, and would not accept my assistance, but bade me quit him and go to bed at an early hour. But I could not go to bed, for I was sure that something was on his mind, and that he ought not to be left alone. So I sat up in my room above, studying my books of devotion and preparing my address to the Sunday-school children for the following Sabbath. And about midnight I went down and again asked my master to let me serve him. He was writing then, but what he was writing I could not tell; and he was under the influence of great emotion, for his eyes were red with weeping, as I had never seen them before, and his handkerchief lay on the table beside him. And again he told me very crossly to leave him and trouble him no more. So I returned to my room and my studies, very anxious about the deah Vicah, and conscious that some crisis had come. And about two o'clock in the morning I heard a heavy fall in the room below. When I got down into the room I found my deah master lying prone on the floor, having fallen from his chair; and raising him up, I discovered that he was dead. And I laid him out reverently upon the couch, and then I turned to examine the papers on the table. I found that some of the letters were from his wife, and some from his son, and others again were from his grandson; and besides there was the will he had made a few days before disinheriting his son, and with that was another that he had made that very evening, and intended doubtless to send the next day to his solicitor; for on the table lav a letter which he had begun to write, addressed "Dear Cunningham," and these were the last words he wrote. Then, turning again to the will, I found that he had left nothing to me; and this vexed me very much indeed, for I had served him very faithfully and very long, and had done all in my power to command his gratitude. Then I confess the evil thought came into my head to appropriate the notes which lay in the sandal-wood box in payment of my past services, and also it occurred to me that if I took possession of the wills I

might dispose of my master's fortune according to the merits of the persons concerned and their behaviour towards me. After that I meditated upon the means of carrying out my purpose, which seemed to me no more than was just and right; and at length I resolved to dispose of my master's body in a manner to lead the world to suppose he had been murdered and robbed. But it was a long time before I could gather sufficient resolution to do this thing. Nevertheless, my strength came when the light of morning began to break, and I felt that Providence sanctioned my design.'

'Here are the notes,' said Yorke, who, during the curate's confession had laid out the suit of clothes and searched the pockets. 'and here is the second will.'

'Open all the windows,' said Jack, when our last visitor was gone, 'and let in the fresh air to clear away this atmosphere of crime.'

I helped eagerly to carry out the idea, and it seemed as if we were rid of a real pestilence, breathing more freely now that we had no secret to keep and nothing to dread. I felt that I must give Kitty a good hug whenever I looked at her, and shake Jack's hand whenever we met, just to give expression to the overflowing joy in my heart, and it was some time before I got quite over a feeling of irritation with Yorke. He had shown a great want of confidence in my prudence—and surely if I have no other quality, I have that—and from first to last had treated me as if I were not worthy of trust, and this I told him roundly when we were out for a walk before lunch, Kitty and Jack being a dozen yards behind us.

'Why, Dick,' said he, nudging my arm to his side, 'you've a quality a thousand times better than prudence, and that is simplicity.' 'Thank you, Bob,' said I; 'but I don't think much of that for a compliment.'

No,' said he; 'I don't think we value any compliment that doesn't give us a little more than our due. However, Dick, you may comfort yourself with this reflection, that, if it had not been for your simplicity and the use we have made of it, neither Kitty nor Jack, nor you nor I, would have been in the happy condition we are now. Happiness is everything, after all.'

'Why, that's true, Bob,' said I; 'and 'tis folly to carp at trifles when the main end is won.' So I nudged his arm to my side as a sign of perfect reconciliation. Nevertheless, I had a host of questions to ask in explanation of matters that perplexed me, and amongst these I may mention one that I put with regard to his appearance at Liverpool as a commercial traveller, and the weighty boxes in his room.

'We were after the Birkenhead gang then,'

he explained: 'for, as you may suppose, I have had more than one iron in the fire during the past two or three months. You passed Singleton and Roberts in the passage. If I had shown you the contents of that box, you would have still greater reason to believe me a thief, for it contained nearly a hundred-weight of plate that we had found that morning in a cart abandoned by the burglars. You see, Dick, I'm not a new hand at this business, having been in the New York detective force for five years before I came over here to see Kitty and start in business for myself.'

My measure of happiness was full, I thought, when we sat round the fire after supper, Kitty between Jack and her father, and I in the corner, where I got a fair view of their happy faces, and a twinkling regard from Mrs. Bailey's merry eye as she came into the room with the spirit stand,

tumblers, and the brass kettle with the hot water.

But it was fuller still on the day when Jack and Kitty were married; and it was yet fuller, I admit, when, a few months later, I led Mrs. Bailey herself blushing to the altar.

As for the curate, his confession, which we fully believed, was not accepted by the jury who tried him on the capital charge of murder, for they returned a verdict of guilty. But the sentence of death was remitted to penal servitude for life, and he is now, I am told, one of the most exemplary convicts at Dartmoor.

THE END.

Telegraphic Address:
Sunlocks, London.

21 BEDFORD STREET, W.C. OCTOBER 1892.

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